

Interview with William Watts

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

WILLIAM WATTS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is August 7, 1995 and this is an interview with William Watts on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. To begin this, could you tell me something about your family and when and where you were born and your early upbringing?

WATTS: I was born in New York City in 1930. My parents married fairly late so I think of them as being always older people. I was one of four sons, a large family within the Watts clan, which is a very big family, many of whom were in business in various ways. My father worked on Wall Street, but I had also a number who had been in public service. A cousin of mine, who was actually a generation older, Phillip Watts, was the executive secretary of the old policy planning staff under George Kennan and Paul Nitze, working under Dean Acheson. He was a very loyal Republican but he had gone in to work with Democrats and when Dulles came in with Eisenhower he was promptly fired.

My two older brothers both served in the Second World War. My eldest brother, whom I was probably closer to than anybody in my life, wound up in China waiting for the invasion of Japan...I obviously find the current discussion about the use of atomic weapons a very

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interesting thing. If you haven't read it, I would urge you to read Jonathan Yardley's piece in the Post this morning. It is quite interesting and very balanced.

Q: Yesterday was the 50th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and particularly in the academic world there has been a great debate over was it necessary or not, which is a much more generational debate, I think, than...

WATTS: I think what is most bothersome is the group that argues that it was done for essentially racist grounds and an attempt to scare the Russians and had very little bearing on the war, which I think frankly is just absolutely bull shit.

Anyway, when the bomb fell, I remember screaming with joy because I said, "'B" (my oldest brother Bigelow's nickname) is going to come home alive." And he did. My older brother was injured on Okinawa, which was one of the bloodiest battles of the war — a precursor of what would have been if we had to go on and invade the mainland. What happened then was — and it changed my life — my oldest brother went through college and was at Harvard Law School, and I was an undergraduate at Yale. He was recalled, having fought through the Second World War, into the Marine Air Corps. He had been a Marine pilot and loved to fly and had stayed in the Reserves. He was recalled to active duty on the day his class began their third year at Harvard Law School and he was killed the day his class graduated.

When he was recalled I immediately quit Yale. I felt, "You fought your war and I just can't stay here." I went into the service where I was assigned to Russian language training in the Air Force.

Q: Where did you go?

WATTS: I went to Brooks Air Force base for the pre-language, where you learn the alphabet, etc.. Then you either went to Monterey or to Syracuse. They took what I think

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were the second-rate students and sent them to Monterey for a short cram course. The people who showed some aptitude were sent to Syracuse for a full year.

Q: I have to say that I am an alumnus of Brooks 6923rd Personal Processing Squadron.

WATTS: I went through that and the 41st RSM. When were you there?

Q: I was there in 1950.

WATTS: I was there in 1951.

Q: I went to Monterey but this was before they had the short course. I took a full 12 months.

WATTS: Was that in the army or air force?

Q: Air force.

WATTS: The last letter we got from my brother before he was killed...I had written him saying how bitter I was that he had fought his war and was back in his second in Korea and I was being in language training. He wrote me a very carefully censored letter, cut out, but he was saying, "If I knew what you were learning I would know what I hear when I go to work every day." In other words, he made it clear that the pilots he was flying and fighting against were mostly Russian, which the Russians, of course, denied for years.

Q: I might as well mention here that I was in Korea in 1952 and I used to monitor the Soviet air force. I was on the fighter net...

WATTS: Yes, we used your tapes for training tapes when I was at Brooks and Syracuse. Then I wound up in Bremerhaven, Germany monitoring the Soviet forces in East Europe.

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Anyway, that, as I say, changed my life. I was planning to go into law with my oldest brother and instead I wound up in the Foreign Service.

Q: I think it is an interesting thing to look at our generation. I was born in 1928. The war, either World War II or the Korean War were great recruiters. I have to say I think the military language system, for those of us who were put into it, also was a great recruiter for the Foreign Service.

WATTS: And for a lot of other things. The number of people who went through the multitude of languages that were being taught. Many of them have joined the Foreign Service, but many went elsewhere using that language. I keep bumping into some of my old friends from back in Brooks and from 1951-53 and Syracuse and a lot of them stayed with what they learned.

Q: You were in the Air Force from when to when?

WATTS: From 1951-55. I served in Lackland AFB for basic training, Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio, a full year at Syracuse, and then I was assigned to the 41st Radio Squadron Mobile in Bremerhaven, Germany. I was there for two years and then discharged. What we were doing was electronics intelligence of Soviet aircraft.

I got out of the Air Force and went back to school. What happened was I had quit Yale, I was an undergraduate of Yale. While I was in the service I had a really flukey deal. There was something called Operation Bootstrap which said that if you had less than six months remaining to finish a college degree, and if it was your intention to make the Air Force a career, you could go to college to finish your undergraduate education. I had finished the Russian language training up at Syracuse, a year. I went back to Yale and said, "Look, I have finished Russian language training, I have my old Yale credits, how about my coming back and finishing up at Yale?" They said, "No way. You go back where you started as first term junior." But Syracuse said, "If you come back we will give you a degree." So, I

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then got that wangled through the Air Force and went to Syracuse for six months and got an undergraduate degree, which I consider a complete fraud. Then I went back down to Texas and was welcomed back by the Air Force and was told I would be going to OCS since I planned to make the Air Force a career. I said, "Well, you know, I have changed my mind. I don't think I want to make the Air Force a career."

I was shipped overseas the next day. Two of us did this together, a friend of mine and I who had gone in...interestingly enough he was sent to Japan and wound up at Habomai, way up in the north at a listening post up there. I wound up in Germany, went through the two years, came back and got out of the service. I then took what I still considered to be a fraudulent degree from Syracuse, to Harvard, since Yale wouldn't recognize it, and said, "Look, I am a graduate of Syracuse," and they said, 'Fine.'" So I went into their masters program in January 1955 and went through that spring term and summer session and the next year, 1956, and because my Russian was good I had no language to take, so I graduated that year getting my masters from the Russian Regional Studies Program. I immediately then entered the Foreign Service.

Q: When did you hear about the Foreign Service?

WATTS: Oh, as a child. My cousin, who I mentioned...my father was the youngest brother of a big family. His oldest brother was about 25 years older. I knew all of those sons, they were my first cousins, although they were a generation older than I. One of them, Phil Watts, who later became the executive secretary of the Policy Planning Staff, I had know for years and years. He was always pushing for me to go into government service. He was a very public spirited man. So, he had a lot of influence on my deciding to go into the Foreign Service. I had other relatives and family...I had a great uncle who was a minister in Paris, who wound up in international law books because he impregnated a young French lady who sued him and he was able to get off payments on the grounds of diplomatic immunity. It was Minister Bigelow vs. Mademoiselle X that I bumped into when I took a

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course in international law. So, the Foreign Service was that other thing I had always thought about.

Q: What course was it you went through at Harvard?

WATTS: It was a two-year masters degree program in Russian area studies in which you had to have Russian as your major, a minor, which I took in China and Asia, in which I had always had a very strong interest. It was a combination of Russian area studies but a lot of other masters degree studies stuff. We had an extraordinary faculty at the time. It was just astounding. Abram Bergson, Adam Ulam, Richard Pipes, Marshall Schulman, Merle Fainsod, Benjamin Schwartz — they were giants in the field.

Q: Looking at it now and also then, did it have a thrust about the Soviet Union of any kind? What were you getting out of it? We are talking about 1956.

WATTS: Having studied under this group, which were the giants in the field and I think one of the most extraordinary combinations of the real Russian/Soviet scholars ever, what startled me when I first went to the Soviet Union was to find out what a dump it was. I was surprised at the degree of backwardness, of relative poverty, of the fact that nothing worked. I was not prepared for that from my studies. I am not saying that these are sympathizers or anything of the sort, absolutely not, they could be very critical. But somehow or other it was an academic exercise. You were learning about history, geography and the political structure. Well, Alex Gershencron's course in the economy was pretty good I must say, but still...and obviously there was the question about the terror and all that, that was all there, but still in all, and I must say most of the people I have talked to felt the same way...they didn't think it was going to be such a complete and utter dump, which it was, nothing worked. It was amazing.

I felt very well educated in Russian history and studies, but if I had one thing I was surprised by it was to find out how really backward the country was.

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Q: At that time were there any in the academic world trying to point out the bright side of the Soviet system?

WATTS: I never in all of my studies there and the earlier period I spent in Syracuse, ran into anybody who was pushing a strongly sympathetic view of the Soviet Union. I spent a year in Oberammergau, Detachment R, where you got a real hard line. They were all emigres and there was no fooling around with them. They were pretty clear about what was going on. No, I never did.

Q: When did you take the Foreign Service exam?

WATTS: I had not yet gotten my masters at Harvard so it was April/May, 1956.

Q: When did you take the oral exam?

WATTS: Soon afterwards. I was still at Harvard when I took the oral, so it was May or June of 1956, which means I may have taken the written sometime in 1955. I remember correcting the senior examiner and the other two people looked quite startled. However, he had a little smile on his face of approval. He asked me who was the Supreme Justice of the Supreme Court and I said, "I am sorry the position doesn't exist, the Chief Justice of the United States is so-and-so." He said, "Oh." It went well.

Q: Do you remember anything else about the exam? I like to try to capture some of the feel of the exam.

WATTS: They asked me some very specific questions that I had no idea of the answers and I just said I didn't know. I was very quick not to bull shit on that. My father, as I said, worked on Wall Street, and one of them asked me about the role of the stock market, etc. in a way that I think was meant to make me defensive. I had no problem responding to that. And then, I can't remember now, but there was one question I was asked that was about something I had done a lot of study on. I will tell you what it was, I remember now.

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He asked a question about the Rhee Line in Korea, which was the line that Syngman Rhee drew between Korea and Japan in terms of Korean territorial waters. Number one, as I mentioned, my minor for my masters was Asia so I knew about that. And, not only that, but because my brother had been there I had spent a lot of time on Korea and Asia, so I was able to give, from their standpoint, a surprisingly knowledgeable response on a very arcane subject. I think from that point the interview was over. It ended very quickly thereafter. They told me within three minutes that I had passed. I was very excited.

Q: When did you come in?

WATTS: I was offered an appointment and I came down to Washington and was told that my files were lost, that I had to start all over again. This was July or August 1956. I said, "What do you mean my files are lost?" They said, "We are very sorry but we can't find them and your appointment is all there and already done, we can't do anything if the files don't exist." At that point...when I was at Harvard there was a guy there by the name of Joe Seltzer from CIA and I had gotten to know him. He heard about my situation and immediately recruited me for CIA. I actually went through, because I was then out of a job, all the tests, including the lie detector test, which was an extraordinary experience in my life, and was hired. I went over to the swearing in place...that morning I got a call from the guy who was then the executive secretary of the State Department, Fisher Howe, saying that my files had been found. Some secretary had opened a drawer and there they were. I really wanted to go into the Foreign Service. So it was a very odd position. I was taken into this room essentially to be entered into the company with about six people around the table. I was told my assignment, which was to be Afghanistan. I was going in as a GS-9. I said, "This is very difficult and embarrassing to me, but my files have just been found at State, so I am not going to accept the appointment." Joe said, "You are a GS-11." I said, "This is really an embarrassment to me," and somebody else said, "You are a GS-12." And I am sitting there going from a beginning salary of \$3700 to you know... I said, "Well, I suppose if you go to 13 I will have to say yes." They said, "Just a moment and the guys start to put their heads together." I said, "No, no, I am just joking. I am out of here." It was

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amazing. When I found out what a GS-12 was making, at that point it was at least twice or more than a GS-9. So, I never actually took the final oath of office to CIA.

I then ended up going into the September class of 1956 of the Foreign Service. Jan Nedelman was the class coordinator, and senior advisor, as an FSO-4 or -3.

Q: Yes, he was mine too. Could you talk about your class a bit and how they saw the Foreign Service and the role of the United States in foreign affairs?

WATTS: I think that most of the people in my class were entering pretty much committed to the Foreign Service as a career. I think today it is totally different. I have talked to a lot of people who today say they are going to give the Foreign Service a try for a year or two and if they don't like it, well screw it. That was not the attitude at all. I don't remember anybody in my class who I would say was in there for a lark. There were some who were obviously more talented than others, etc. In my class I know of...Harry Thayer wound up as ambassador to Singapore and Taiwan; Jack Matlock, to my great surprise, ended up as ambassador to the Soviet Union; John Burke, who recently died, was ambassador to Guyana; Frank McNeil was ambassador to Costa Rica. I know there are others, I just can't remember. Of the people who stayed, most of them did very well. Mark Pratt was never an ambassador, but he did very well and is heavily involved in China stuff. Ed Hurwitz wound up as ambassador to Kyrgyzstan and is now back here. It was a very, very sharp class. We had a number of M.A.s and Ph.D.s. I would say it was a group that really was going in for the duration.

Q: How well did you think the course prepared you, looking at the training?

WATTS: It was divided when I went, six weeks and six weeks. The first six weeks was about the whole State Department operations and the second six weeks was wholly consular work. Since I was assigned to the Department I only went through the first six weeks. I found a lot of that just boring as hell, frankly. We would go around to these

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different departments and they would have somebody explain what that department did. I didn't feel it was very stimulating, to be honest with you.

The consular session that I ended up taking at the end of my first tour in Washington in DRS, Soviet internal affairs, in INR, turned out to be very helpful because my second assignment was Seoul as a consular officer for my first year. It was a very busy consular post, so that helped me a lot. But in terms of the other part, I didn't find it very helpful.

Q: Your first assignment was to INR?

WATTS: Yes, in what was called the Soviet internal branch. We worked exclusively on what was going on inside the Soviet Union. There was a monthly report that came out which included both what we did in internal and external, plus the whole East European area. It was I thought an extraordinarily good document. We had some very smart people in there. Some who were civil service and stayed for a long time and some of us Foreign Service who stayed only a couple of years or so. But it was a really powerful thing. We had daily reports and things we would be working on as a special report. We also prepared every morning, and that was strictly done by the people pretty much on the internal branch, but not exclusively, and I had to get in about 5:30 to prepare, the morning briefing report that was given to the head of INR for his morning meeting with the Secretary of State. So, we prepared the head of INR — Oscar Armstrong and one other while I was there. That was a tough job. You would come staggering in half asleep and have to go through all of the overnight take. And then I went and did the same kind of thing later in the White House for the President, so it was sort of a funny...

Q: What was your impression of our knowledge of what was going on inside the Soviet Union?

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WATTS: My feeling was that it was pretty good. I was not aware at that point, I was not cleared, well none of us had clearance for things like the Gamma Guppie Operation. None of us knew about that.

Q: What was Gamma Guppie?

WATTS: That was where we had the telephones of the Soviet leaders' cars wired. All that came out later on. That was just unbelievable intelligence. Well, it was not wired, it was monitoring through satellite. It was just astonishing stuff. I would say that the bulk of our information was reading the Soviet periodicals and papers and despatches from the embassy, which I thought were very good and perceptive.

Q: Who did this? One of the great sources of intelligence for the Peoples Republic of China was the China watchers in Hong Kong who read every local paper they could get a hold of. It is a good way to find out what is happening. Who actually sat down and read these papers? Were they read in Moscow or Washington?

WATTS: In the internal branch, first Ken Kerst and then Gordon Tiger were the heads of it. Then Boris Klosson and Tom Larson ran all of DRS, internal and external. Then we had Heyward Isham. Matlock was there for a while. Paul Smith, Ed Sokol, Fred Armstrong, myself. We had six or seven officers on internal and another four or five on external affairs. Each of us got different papers. I was assigned government and law. So I used to read Izvestia every day. And I would read a lot of law- linked journals, etc. Somebody else read literary stuff. We had somebody reading the economic stuff. That is where Ed Hurwitz was. So, yes, we did a lot of that and it was also done in Moscow. We were both doing a huge amount of reading as was, of course, the Agency and Defense. So you were getting a lot read.

Let me give you an example of how this played out in reality. At the time of the purge of the "Anti-Party Group" in 1957, Ken Kerst, and this was the advantage of having people

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who stayed there a long, long time...there was a lead editorial in Pravda that made a reference to "no matter how high his post may be," and Ken said, "Uh oh, that is a purge." He wrote a memo that said this indicated a purge is about to occur and the logical person, given a lot of other stuff that was said, was Lavrenti Beria...he asked me to go back into stuff I had been reading in the legal stuff and there were hints of it. He was absolutely right. It was amazing. I think in fact he got some kind of a commendation for that. He predicted this about two or three days before the event. It was very interesting. So you had people with that kind of background.

Q: You were in INR from when to when?

WATTS: From 1956-58.

Q: This was during the Suez Crisis which must have put quite a strain on the apparatus. How were we seeing things?

WATTS: I didn't work on the external stuff like the Suez and the invasion of Hungary, etc. That was all external. I read it in the papers but it really didn't affect me professionally and I didn't see particularly how that played out with the guys in external. We talked about it, but I didn't have any particular feeling about it.

Q: What was the feeling of INR about what was coming out of the CIA?

WATTS: First of all I don't remember frankly seeing that much from CIA. I saw much more when I was in the White House, but that was much later.

Q: Did you feel that you were working closely with the desk? Sometimes in INR you can make up these wonderful papers but feel that the desk is so busy it doesn't pay any attention.

WATTS: We had a very unusually good relationship because the people on the desk, there was Nat Davis, Jack Armitage, Ted Elliot...we had people in both areas that had

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served in Moscow and knew each other, so we were lucky that way. We didn't feel all cut off, that we were just writing in a vacuum. They wanted our stuff, they would call and ask for it. So, I must say, I personally felt our work was used and paid attention to.

Q: In 1958 you left.

WATTS: I was assigned to Korea.

Q: You were there when?

WATTS: From 1958-60. That assignment was an enormous shock because my brother had been killed there and here I get my first assignment it being read out at the end of the course..."and Watts gets Seoul, Korea." A lot of people knew about my brother. I was absolutely stunned. I had figured of any place in the world I could go, I am going to go there. It was very interesting. The next day I got a call from a woman in Far East personnel asking if I would come over. I went over and was told that I had this assignment to Seoul but they had not known about this situation with my brother and if I would like to go somewhere else I could. I was totally astonished. I couldn't believe a bureaucracy worked that way. I was amazed and I must confess I broke into tears and this poor lady was embarrassed. I said, "No, I have to go and want to go see where my brother died." And, I am profoundly grateful that I went because I had a phenomenally good tour.

I went there in 1958 and the ambassador then was Walter Dowling. He was a very close friend of Christian Herter, who was then Under Secretary under Dulles. Herter wrote him a letter telling him that this fine young man is coming out who is the cousin of one of my closest friends, Philip Watts, etc. So, I arrived in Seoul, without my wife who was coming later because we had just had a child, and lo and behold I was put up in the Dowling guest house. I thought that was bad news. You talk about teacher's pet! And then my wife arrived and we stayed there living in this guest house and we were included in everything,

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I mean everything. This, I realized, was untenable. Fortunately the people in the embassy were very nice, but it was not a good situation.

I did not want to live in the embassy compound. I didn't want to be in a place behind barriers, etc. So, we actually bought a Korean home paying some modest amount of money, although for the Koreans it was a huge amount. They invested it at about 10 percent a month and made a fortune of it. When we left we got it all back. I think it was the equivalent of \$5000. We moved into this Korean home on the outskirts of Seoul off on a dirt road, sleeping on the floor, etc. It became one of the most popular places in the embassy, everybody wanted to be invited to our house because we used to get Koreans to come all the time and they just loved it. There were no guards, we were on our own. It was phenomenal and a very exciting experience. In fact, during the student revolution when Rhee was overthrown, my home was sort of wild. We became an operational center away from the compound and the embassy that was kind of fascinating.

Q: When you arrived in 1958, what was the situation as you saw it in Korea?

WATTS: Desperate. The drive in from the airport was on a two lane, rutted road, through mud flats and rice paddies. All the way down to Seoul there was nothing on that side of the Han River which is now a huge buildup...

Q: We are talking about the south side of the Han River?

WATTS: Yes, where now is the international airport. At that time there was one bridge over the river and that was it, and it wasn't all that crowded. You get downtown and the embassy, which later became the USIS office, was across the street from the old Bando Hotel which had nine stories and was the tallest building in Seoul. The Bando is now gone, obviously, the Lotte is there. City Hall was up the street and further along the old Capitol building. Those were the four biggest buildings in the city, and there was nothing else there.

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Q: What was the government like at that time?

WATTS: It was Syngman Rhee's dictatorship. There was no question that it was a dictatorship. The home minister, Choe In-gyu, was famous as a molester of little girls, grabbing people off the street. The general sense of the city was uneasy. The economy was in very bad shape. The AID mission was very large. I knew a lot of people out there and they were totally frustrated with the inefficiency of anything they were doing.

When I first arrived, the summer of 1958, the level of disturbance was very low. There wasn't much going on. We had a very tight relationship with the government, that is the embassy did. I used to see Syngman Rhee a lot. Dowling used to take me everywhere. I got to know Kim Young-Sam and Kim Dae-Jung well, they were junior members of the national assembly. I have stayed in touch with them over the years.

My first year in the consular section what I was doing was issuing a lot of visas, although I traveled quite a lot. The second year Dowling pulled me up into the political section and I must say that was an extraordinary year. That was the year of the overthrow of the Rhee government.

Q: Before we get to that, when you were doing visa work, what was the attitude towards Koreans going to the United States?

WATTS: It was the Holy Grail with long lines trying to get visas. Everybody wanted to go and at that time very few people had any intention of returning. So, our assignment really was to press very hard on the business of people returning and determine a reason for them to be returning.

Dowling was a very hard-working ambassador, he really tried to reach out, inviting a lot of people to dinners, etc. And that included people who were not completely clean as far as the government was concerned. I mean people the government were suspicious of. It really was a security state. The police were real thugs as were the security people. It was

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a very rough environment. And they were not at all happy with where I was living. There were guys around that you could see going up and down the streets trying to see who was coming to the house. I lived with a Korean family, it was a compound.

The desire of the people to get visas was just overwhelming. And, of course, there were all these visa shops around by the embassy running these terrible scams guaranteeing to get you a visa and they couldn't. And, of course, the other thing which was very interesting was the girls, the prostitutes who were marrying the GIs. Of course, none of them were prostitutes, they were all lovely women who were taking care of nice service men. I had one episode involving this woman who had been arrested three times for prostitution and there was no way that I could approve that. Actually you didn't approve the visas, what you had to do...the army would send the couple over before they were allowed to get married. They had to come over to the embassy and be interviewed and we had to issue a clearance that they would get a visa if they got married. In this one case I just said that I was sorry and could not issue this clearance. This woman picked up a glass ashtray and threw it at me. It hit the wall and just exploded. It was quite dramatic.

The desire to get a visa was just...and it was looked upon for many of these people as a ticket to freedom.

Q: But, basically, we weren't issuing many visas were we?

WATTS: We had the consul, Tom Mayfield, Bill Kane, and at least three different vice consuls. So we had four consular officers issuing quite a few visas. The marriage thing was a big deal. After we gave the approval for them to get married, they would go down to city hall and get entered on the hojok tungbun, the family tree, and bring it back and I would issue a certificate of witness to marriage, which was then stamped and that was the magic document. That then allowed them to apply for a visa. And all of these people thought I was the minister, the guy who married them. For years I got letters, I have a

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whole bunch of people named after me, maybe a couple of hundred, because I issued the document and was considered the minister by them. So there were a lot.

Q: This was still in the fifties and the GIs were still marrying Asians, did you feel any racist uncomfortableness on the part of the Department when issuing visas?

WATTS: No, not at all. It didn't make any difference, either from the American side as to whether the GI was white or black or over the girl...the clear thing was about prostitution, that was the main concern.

The other thing that was fascinating was that many of these girls would come in and one of the things they had to do was to go through the 548 MedEvac hospitals which was a real MASH type unit, and usually they were just loaded with all kinds of bugs. They had ringworm, tapeworm, whipworm, etc. So, before they could get a visa they had to go back and get medication. Some of these girls would come in and think I was a miracle worker. I would send them over there and they said that all of a sudden they felt well for the first time in their life. It was a very interesting phenomenon.

Q: How wonderful.

WATTS: It really was. I just found it thrilling to see these cute looking girls who looked so wan when they first came in and then returned a month or two later just brimming with energy.

One other story I want to tell about this because it is one of the most interesting human interest stories of my entire Foreign Service career. On the visa application form you put name and then it says aliases if any. That is a very legitimate...obviously it is particularly useful in working against narcotics when they come in and can be extradited and thrown out of the country for lying on their visa application. I noticed that every single one would be Kim So-and-so, alias Watanabe So-and-so, written in a tiny cramped writing about one/

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eight the size of the Korean name. I went to Mr. Chou, who was a Korean local and said, "Mr. Chou, why is it that everybody who has a Japanese name, and everybody did..."

Q: They were required to by the Japanese.

WATTS: Yes, absolutely. They were also not allowed to speak Korean. This is the kind of thing that I can get so angry about when people start talking about the bomb, etc. "Why is the Japanese name always written so small?" He said, "Oh, that is not important." I said, "Look, it obviously is important. Perhaps not if I saw it only once or twice, but I see it on every application." We came to be good friends Mr. Chou and I. When I moved into a Korean house and he learned my brother had been killed in Korea, he practically adopted me. He said, "You have to understand. We thought you were our liberators and you came in here and what do you do. You divide the country and maybe we can understand that. But then you make us use these hated, hated Japanese names. We can't understand how you can do this to us." So, I wrote a despatch recommending a change in the Foreign Service Manual Regulations explaining the whole background of this. I can remember the exact wording, although I am sure it is still there, I'm sure. Something like, "For purposes of Koreans with a Japanese surname or name given to them during the period of Japanese occupation, it is not required to include that Japanese name unless it is related to criminal activity." So a person who would use that name and then had gotten in trouble and use it for...in other words to protect the Justice thing. It went through Justice and they said, "Fine."

Well, I came to work one morning about six months later and came in and suddenly Mr. Chou said, "You have to come out." I went out on the street and there were hundreds of people out there. What had happened was the ruling had been approved and therefore the Japanese name was dropped and nobody had to use it anymore. When I came out they began cheering and cheering. It was very interesting. I think that was one of my proudest accomplishments. The people were so pleased.

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Q: You moved up into the political section and were there from 1959-60. How did Ambassador Dowling operate from your observation?

WATTS: Fairly soon after I moved upstairs he was replaced by McConaughy and went on to become ambassador to Germany. Dowling was my first ambassador. I guess it tends to be the case that if it was a good experience it becomes idealized in retrospect. You have to understand again that I had this extraordinary personal relationship with him, which continued way after the Foreign Service. I saw him regularly until he died. But he was a very engaged ambassador with the staff, I must say particularly with people he liked it is true. But he was very involved and knew people. I have known ambassadors who didn't know the names of his staff even after two years, but he was not that way. He was extremely interested in Korea. He was fascinated by it. He used to give me all kinds of little assignments to find out something about, for example, how the Koreans spelt their name. He was intrigued why some people were Lee, Rhee and Hee, etc. So I had to do a little homework. He traveled quite a lot.

Q: How did he get along with Rhee?

WATTS: My sense was that it was a fairly easy relationship. See, the big problems, the real tense times, didn't come until after McConaughy was ambassador. I wouldn't want to characterize it as close, but when he needed to see him he obviously could always get to see him and could make his points. Whether Rhee did anything, that was always a question. Rhee was an extraordinarily volatile and interesting man. I must say I had some very intriguing episodes when taking people to see him, etc. That is very hard for me to answer. Rhee, for example, didn't go out to visit, go over to the Dowling that I remember, you went there.

Q: The ambassador has to develop his own relationship. Within a political section you often get quite a bit of ferment going, particularly in a country where there is a very strong

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government, right, left or whatever. How would you describe the ferment, or whatever was happening in the political section when you went up there?

WATTS: I moved up there just at the time that Bill Jones, who had been the political counselor, was reassigned. He was replaced by Don Ranard. D. Ranard is a palindrome, and that was, some of us felt, his greatest claim to distinction.

Q: Within the Korean-American context he was a mover and shaker.

WATTS: He was when he got back here.

Q: Yes, and I would like to catch him when he was there.

WATTS: Energy and insight were not his strong points. The Embassy political section broke down into two groups and it reflected the Korean political system. The political section was split between the Chayu-dang and Minju-dang, the old faction and new factions. Cho Byong-ok was the head of the Chayu-dang, the old (liberal) faction and Chang Myon (John Chang) was the head of the Minju-dang, the new (conservative) faction. Tom Shoesmith, who later became ambassador to Malaysia, Howard Schaffer, who became ambassador to Bangladesh and is now out in Sri Lanka where his wife is ambassador, and I referred to ourselves as the old faction, and basically did support what Cho Byong-ok was trying to do. We looked upon Ranard and the two others in this section as the weak new faction.

It was a very frustrating period. I remember writing despatches....I got a very interesting assignment. I was cleared to go to the Korean prison compound, where the North Korean agents they had picked up were, to interview them.

Q: At this time and for years there was a constant flow of agents coming in by ship or infiltration.

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WATTS: Most of them got killed, but I was given the assignment because I was assigned to cover events at Panmunjom, the North Korean reporting officer, because I spoke Russian. So, I went up to the DMZ all the time to attend all the meetings. Then I got this okay to go and interview these guys. I really got some extraordinary stuff, particularly because at that time the North Korean regime had decided to follow the Sovnarkhoz system of the Soviet Union, these councils of national economy where they broke the Soviet Union up into about 15 different regional economic areas. And Kim Il Sung, this was a time of particularly close relations with the Soviets, decided to do this in North Korea. I had this one guy that I was interviewing and it was fascinating. I really could talk to him. He was rather amazed because the South Koreans didn't know what was going on. He at times was getting very interesting. I was getting real insight into the way Korea was divided then. I wrote this huge despatch, too long. Ranard kept putting it into the bottom of the in box and it didn't go out for months. By the way, this guy, as was usual, after about five interviews, I went and asked to interview him again and was told that he had become ill, and that was the end of him. They thought they had gotten all they could out of him and just killed him. And that was what was happening to one after another. With this one guy in particular I finally said, "Please, do not let him get ill until I have a couple more interviews." But apparently somebody killed him. They are tough.

Q: *Oh, yes.*

WATTS: The Turkish Brigade had a unit about half way up to the DMZ and it turned out that the Turks found a Korean who was stealing things out of the Turkish compound. They crucified him, literally nailed him to a cross, at the entrance. The Koreans came up with tanks but finally backed off and that was one of the few times I have ever seen them do so.

Q: *Two cultures getting ready to go the route.*

WATTS: That was very interesting.

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Q: How did things evolve in the political section? We are talking about McConaughy now when he came in. How did he work?

WATTS: McConaughy was a very courtly Southern gentleman and really different from Dowling. He was a much more cautious and conservative, careful...I don't think of him as a guy who wanted to make waves. Dowling didn't mind making waves and was a very spirited guy. I had enormous respect for him. McConaughy was a lot more cautious. But he wound up coming in, boy, events took over. All hell broke loose. The foment and ferment was building up and beginning to happen all over the country.

Q: Was the political section able to monitor this? It is very difficult when you are on the spot to sometimes see a revolution that is brewing.

WATTS: We had, I think and I will say this particularly with Tom, Howard and myself, we spent as much time traveling as the money allowed and we had two or three really good interpreters. One of them now lives here and the other one I see when I go to Seoul. We really did a lot of traveling. I think we picked up a lot of stuff, including stuff that we quite legitimately could have been kicked out over. We could have been PNGed. For example, we would go off and get to these small towns and stay in one of those little inns and about 2:00 in the morning I would hear a tap and I would sneak out with him and we would go off on our hands and knees crawling down to get into a car and go off and meet with people unhappy with the system. It was really wild stuff and clearly they would have been in their rights to kick us out.

I can't say we predicted a revolution, but I think we were pretty damn good in reporting a lot of things that were going on. I spent a lot of time at the universities and particularly at Korea University, which at that time was one of the major areas of some of that ferment. We were at least reporting that things were happening.

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Q: On reporting, were there any restrictions? We are still talking about the Eisenhower period. Walter Robertson was the head of Pacific Asian Affairs. I don't know whether Korea fell into this, one had to be careful dealing with this group, particularly when dealing with Chiang Kai-shek and all that, one had to be careful, or at least the feeling was because of the fate of the China hands. Here is Syngman Rhee who is the darling of some people you might call the right wing conservatives. He was on his last legs. When you were there was there any feeling that you had to be careful or that the ambassador let it be known?

WATTS: I must say I didn't particularly feel that. I had one very interesting episode I am reminded of by you mentioning the right wing. Walter Judd came into town. A congressman from Michigan or Wisconsin and a total Chiang Kai-shek defender who thought Rhee was a great man. I went with him to meet with Rhee. The last year he was an old failing man, which is one thing to remember. He was not well. This time we went in. Park Chan-il was his private secretary, notorious as a reputed Svengali/Rasputin who was running Rhee and the archenemy of Korea. He became a very good friend of mine. He tried to defect to me in our Korean home, in the middle of the student revolution after Rhee resigned. That is a story I will have to get in to.

I went with Walter Judd and we get in with Rhee. Park Chan-il would watch the old man and give me a signal when it was time to go. So, I sort of cut off and said, "Mr. Congressman, I think Dr. Rhee has another appointment so I think perhaps we should leave." He said, "Oh, yes," and gets up and said, "Well, President Rhee it is always great to see you. Sayonara." Here is a guy who is supposed to be a knowledgeable expert on Asia and he says goodbye in Japanese to a man whose life was one of hating the Japanese. Rhee had a tic in his eye and I thought he was going to have a stroke. I was really nervous and just grabbed Judd and explained it to him. He really didn't understand how bad that was. I was just amazed.

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I moved up to the political section about the middle of 1969, I suppose, and by then Rhee was already failing and more and more power was taken over by Lee Ki-bung, who was sort of his deputy, whose son Rhee had adopted and was a captain in the army. He was more and more in control.

I will give you an example of a despatch that Tom and I wrote on the myth of non-intervention. This was when McConaughy was ambassador. There was this constant stuff saying that we can't interfere in internal affairs of another country and we have to be careful about not intervening in the internal political process here. These were instructions that we kept getting. Our argument was that our presence here was such an overwhelming intervention that no matter what we do we are intervening. If we say, "Yes," we are intervening and if we do nothing we are intervening. So let's stop kidding ourselves because everything we do constitutes intervention and we need to look at it in that perspective. Well, McConaughy was really taken aback with by despatch. But he sent it in putting a note on top saying that he thought these were views that needed to be considered, although he didn't endorse them.

Q: How did he get along with Don Ranard?

WATTS: In all candor, I think Ranard was in over his head. As things began to move, Tom, Howard and I just started more and more to just act on our own. We had the complete support of Marshall Green who had come in as DCM. I may be exaggerating, this is a long time ago, but I have the memory that what happened was you had Ranard and the two others, operating in one sphere, and Tom, Howard and I, with Marshall's blessing, operating in another. Now, that may be putting this improperly, I don't know. We were doing a lot of stuff. By the time things heated up we were off and running.

Q: Okay, let's talk about how you saw the developments?

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WATTS: I am trying to recall. There were the elections and this was the famous three man vote elections where everybody had to go in teams of three into the voting booth and show their ballot to each other and then vote. This was in the spring of 1960.

Q: What was the purpose of this?

WATTS: It was so everybody would see how everybody else voted so there was no way you voted for anybody but Rhee.

Q: I see.

WATTS: The assumption was that Choe In-gyu, the home minister, wanted to have an 88 percent for Rhee to match his upcoming 88th birthday. We were spread all over the place. I was in some little dinky town off in the middle of nowhere. In the translations I came out as Wax Williams and was always known as Wax Williams after that. But, it was very interesting. I went over to the ballot place and it was completely a fraud, no question.

It was after that, that the great event occurred which was a student in Masan got shot and had that shell in his eye. They tried to cover this up, but it finally appeared in the paper and then all hell broke loose in Masan. Then it started to spread. You began to get these groups gathering and protesting. It built and built for a couple of months or so, I don't remember exactly how long. We used to go out to the university trying to get a sense of what was happening. It picked up very rapidly in the last week or ten days. I remember one time coming around a corner and the army was pushing back the students, and I suddenly had a gun and bayonet in my gut. I remember going out with Peter Kalisher, CBS news...he and I were running around, seeing the students marching and police going after them with these things with balls on the end and clubbing them. It was something.

This stuff just kept building and building, and finally Rhee tried to restore order by bringing in the army as things were clearly getting ahead of the police. The big question was what were they going to do? What they did was to basically seal off the old national assembly

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building to keep it from any destruction, but they didn't stop the students. The students then knew the army was with them and from there on it was very quick.

Now there was one thing that happened in the middle of this but I don't remember the timing, whether before or after that, but McConaughy did issue a statement referring to the "justifiable grievances of the students" and that was just like...we were heroes, let me tell you.

Q: How did that come about?

WATTS: It was after some of the shooting and some students had been killed and it was in response to this calling for the restoration of order and the justifiable grievances of the students. They just took that as an absolute blessing. I was up just outside Kyungmudae, the president's palace, calling into Marshall watching as the students were coming up and they would rip their shirts open, and I saw 20 people or so get shot about ten feet away. Finally the police couldn't do anything and broke and ran around inside and the rest of the students came charging up jumping over these dead bodies. It was unbelievable. Then they would carry them away.

I was up on the roof of the Hankuk Ilbo building and a piece of rock went by my head, chipped off by a passing bullet. One of my closest Korean friends and I were out on the street and he got shot...the police came out of the Kwanghwamun police box, that big intersection, with submarine guns firing. The guns pull right. He was next to me and he died. I had to carry his body out of the street with another guy. We found a shop and got some shovels to carry because what the police were doing was grabbing bodies and taking their identification and going to arrest their parents. So we carried this man way out and dug a hole and buried him. It was an extraordinary period.

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Tom and I were actually in the embassy building and they were still firing blanks when all of a sudden from the noise the bullets were making changed. A Korean journalist with us said, "live fire!"

Then finally Tom went with McConaughy up to speak to Rhee basically asking him to resign.

Q: What was the feeling of the embassy? Obviously we had a concern about the army just north of the DMZ. Were we concerned whether the students were going, was it going to be left wing coup or what?

WATTS: Well, I will tell you that our faction thought it was the greatest thing that ever happened, we loved it. We were out there with them and very excited. We were thrilled with the idea of getting rid of what had become a totally corrupt dictatorship. I think, generally speaking that people in the embassy were all kind of excited about something we supported the objective of, if it was the ending of this dictatorship and moving in the direction of greater democracy.

You know, the fear of a possible attack from the North was something I must confess I gave almost no thought to and I don't think too many did. I think there was a feeling in part that first of all that the US forces and the Korean forces were in pretty good shape.

Q: Yes, this wasn't that far after the Korean War.

WATTS: You are talking still of a well, well armed and powerful force.

Q: Yes, so it was quite different from what happened later on.

WATTS: Yes. So, I don't think that ever became...obviously we followed what they were staying very carefully and that was my job. I am sure whole units must have been on total alert. I guess part of it was that this was such an exciting damn development that

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was taking place right there in front of us that you just knew you were in the middle of something that was truly historical.

Q: How did it play out, from your perspective?

WATTS: It played out that after, and there are lots of specifics that I am not aware of about who saw who, etc., but eventually Rhee agreed to step down. Then Lee Ki-bung, who we thought was going to take over, committed suicide. There was a brief period and then Chang Myon became president. I had gone by then.

As soon as Syngman Rhee stepped down, the entire civilian security apparatus disappeared. These guys were gone. They got out of their uniforms and disappeared. Choe In-gyu's house was burned to the ground. The students took over the city. It was the god damndest thing you have ever seen. They just took over, directed traffic and for a few days things ran beautifully. The army stood aside. They were heroes, we were heroes. I walked out of the embassy building and this old man falls to his knees holding an American flag and kisses my shoes while handing me the flag. This was happening all over the place. For several days that was what was going on. It was an amazing period. The students ran the place. Then civilian order came back. I left quite soon after that.

I have one story. President Rhee returned to his own personal residence. After things had calmed down a letter arrived from Eisenhower to Syngman Rhee. Eisenhower had been there shortly before and I was the control officer for that whole trip, and that was a wild operation. In this letter Eisenhower congratulates Rhee on this courageous decision and he will always be remembered as the father of his country. A very nice letter. McConaughy called me in and asked if I could get in touch with Park Chan-il. I called him up, and told him I have a letter from President Eisenhower for President Rhee and Ambassador McConaughy wants me to deliver it. He says, "Fine. I will come over to get you and we can go to President's Rhee private home and give it to him."

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So he picked me up in his car and we went over and in. He had alerted ex-President Rhee and Madame Rhee, the so-called Austrian Queen, about this letter. They come down the walk and it was really fascinating because this was a broken old man hanging on to his wife with a cane hobbling along. He comes down and recognizes me. I say, "Mr. President, Ambassador McConaughy has asked me to deliver this letter to you from President Eisenhower." He opens it and he sort of squinted at it and then gave it to Madame Rhee to read it. She read it out loud to him. Rhee reached over for the letter, spat on it, threw it down, and turned around and walked away. I picked up the letter and gave it back to Park Chan-il. He says, "Thanks, you have done your duty." I go back to the embassy and McConaughy said, "How did it go Bill?" I said, "Well, let me tell you." I described it to him. He said, "Well, we have to get a telegram off right away and tell Washington what happened." I drafted a telegram and said, "At my instructions, embassy officer Watts delivered the letter from President Eisenhower to President Rhee, who received it with great emotion." I took it back to McConaughy and asked if it was okay and he said, "Well done, well done," and off it went. No mention of spitting on the letter!

Q: Okay, we will stop at this point. Before we leave Korea, I would like to ask you one last thing on the Eisenhower visit. I have Marshall Green talking about it, but I would like to have someone who was sort of down in the...

WATTS: Well, Marshall was the control officer as DCM and I was the guy he picked to be his assistant.

Q: So we will pick it up then next time.

Q: We were talking about Eisenhower's visit.

WATTS: That was an extraordinary episode because as you remember that was in the spring of 1960 and Eisenhower was in the Philippines. When they left they were going to Japan to commemorate the mutual security treaty with the Japanese when that huge riot

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broke out in Tokyo and Ambassador MacArthur with Jim Hagerty, the President's press secretary in a car was mobbed. So Eisenhower couldn't go to Japan, he had to go into Korea two days early. Marshall Green was the DCM who was the control officer, as always is the case for these visits, and I was the grunt doing the scut work. It was quite amusing because we were at a meeting in the foreign ministry building and Marshall had left to go home. It was late in the evening and the next day the President was to go into Tokyo and was due to come to Korea about three days later. I was about to leave when somebody came running in and said, "We have a phone call from President Eisenhower's plane." They brought in a phone and gave it to me. They said that they had just heard that the President was coming directly and would be stopping in Taiwan coming in about two days early. All the Koreans said they couldn't arrange for such a visit so quickly.

Then the phone rings again and it was Tom Stevens asking to speak to ever was there from the embassy. I got to know Tom later and he was a wonderful person. He was Eisenhower's appointments secretary who worked for him for years and then later went to work for Rockefeller. I got on the phone and he said, "This is Tom Stevens, who is this?" I said, "This is Bill Watts, I'm with the embassy." "Well, listen, we are coming in tomorrow or the next day. We can't go to Tokyo, the god damn Japanese are blowing up the ambassador's car. We are going to Taiwan and will be in early." I said, "Well, you know you can't do that. We can't arrange anything and get it all done. The Koreans say they can't do it." Stephens said, "What is your name sonny?" I said, "Well, maybe we can arrange this, I'll get back to you."

I then spoke to the people and they said, "Oh, my God." I said, "Look, if we can't do it, I am out of here. I am going home and I am through." We sat up all night and the next day having to rearrange everything. It was absolute mayhem. The very funny thing was when Eisenhower arrived...the Presidential Cadillac was flown in along with secret service men, etc... He was in this big car and as he was coming through the square to go around behind Duck Su Palace, up the driveway to the Ambassador's residence where he was staying, the car broke down. Here was this enormous gun boat not moving. At that point literally

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hundreds of students just charged the car. I could see the secret service guys, they were so edgy. I was there and was running around. Well, these kids pushed the car up the ramp and into the driveway and up to the residence and then all turned around and left. It was a delightful episode. I must say that Eisenhower was received as a true hero because this was shortly after the revolution and our behavior, the embassy was held in very, very high esteem.

The visit, itself, was not very important. It went well. It was later, of course, that Eisenhower sent that letter I mentioned earlier that Rhee spat on.

The one thing I really remember about the visit was the way the students took over the city and ran the place for days. It was really an extraordinary episode.

Q: You had lived outside the compound and had all these Korean contacts. Did you find yourself sort of the center with young people coming to you and asking what should they do and how should they do it?

WATTS: Yes. I had a lot of people coming around to the house because they knew about me. I was the only person living outside the compound. Then Park Chan-il, who was Rhee's private secretary, who many people thought of as the evil genius behind the throne, actually came to me and in essence asked if he could defect to the States, because he was scared for his life. Ultimately, it turned out all right and he left and is now living in the States. Rhee, of course, soon afterwards flew him out to Honolulu. I think his wife is still alive in Hawaii. There has been talk about her returning to Korea.

Q: During the student revolution, was there any dispute or disunity at the embassy that you saw about how...?

WATTS: I don't think so. It was so clear by then to everybody that the regime was doomed. Once the army made clear that they wouldn't...when they came in what the General did instead of trying to disperse the students, he simply took up a defensive position around

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the national assembly building to avoid a confrontation between the students and political figures in the assembly. The students took that, and I think quite correctly, as a statement that the army was not going to put them down. And it was over. It took them another day or two and some deaths before it finally broke. But that was it. And then McConaughy went with Tom Shoemsmith to essentially tell Rhee he had to resign. Very reluctantly Rhee did step down and Lee Ki-bung, his lieutenant, killed himself. Then Huh Chung became acting prime minister until elections when Chang Myon was elected and then overthrown in the first military coup, but that was later after I left.

Q: You left there when?

WATTS: In the middle of 1960.

Q: Where did you go?

WATTS: I went to Russian language training. I had been assigned to the embassy in Stockholm, but I think that Marshall Green intervened. I was assigned to the consular section in Stockholm but the assignment was suddenly switched and I went to Russian language training in Oberammergau for a year and then went on to Moscow.

Q: How did you find Oberammergau?

WATTS: It was a gorgeous place to live. We all had very nice housing. I was married by then and actually had one child and a second child born while there. The instruction from my stand point...I already had a masters in Russian studies from Harvard and so there was virtually nothing in the substance of what was being taught that I hadn't already had. The language part of it was very helpful because the classes were all in Russian. You were supposed to speak Russian all the time, but nobody did. But all the classes were in Russian. We had along with history, geography, politics, etc. also language training at whatever level you were at. I think it was more useful for people who hadn't had the kind of previous academic training that I had. At that time at least it was almost impossible to

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be assigned to Moscow if you didn't go through Detachment R (Oberammergau Russian Language Training School). The whole Oberammergau outfit was a very sensitive thing. It was a US Army intelligence training base with particular...a lot of military guys were there getting a lot of specialized training before going to Moscow.

Q: You went to Moscow when?

WATTS: I was there from the middle of 1961 to the middle of 1963. I arrived in about July/August 1961 and left just before the fourth of July, 1963.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WATTS: When I arrived the ambassador was Tommy Thompson, who you know is one of the legendary figures in the Russian field. He was a very distant ambassador to work for. We used to comment that when he was replaced by Foy Kohler that under Thompson the door to the ambassador's office was always closed; with Kohler it was always open. It was sort of indicative of their styles of operating. Thompson tended to work through a very small number of people. The DCM was Boris Klosson, who I had known earlier in INR, in 1956-58. The Thompsons and Klossons were very close. Obviously, other embassy people were invited to receptions, etc., but Thompson did work heavily through Klosson. He was rather remote as an ambassador, but hugely knowledgeable.

Q: During this period, 1961-63, you were there during the time of Khrushchev when he was feeling his most rambunctious.

WATTS: Up through the missile crisis.

Q: How did you see the Soviet Union and what was the situation there when you arrived?

WATTS: First of all I was very fortunate. I was an FSO but assigned to work in the cultural affairs section which at that time was clearly the best job to have in the embassy. My first assignment was to run one of the exchange exhibits we have between the United States

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and the Soviet Union under the cultural exchange agreement of 1959. I ran, I guess, the third of these exhibits. It was on transportation. I arrived in the Soviet Union, after the Bay of Pigs episode, at the beginning of the thawing. This was when Dudintsev's "Not By Bread Alone" was published in Novy Mir, the literary magazine. We were able to entertain a lot, particularly because I was in the cultural affairs section. We had people like Yevtushenko, Rozhdestvensky, and others would come to dinner. That was a remarkable period up to the Berlin Wall when it just shut down very harshly.

Travel remained very restricted. As I said before, I was surprised how much worse off the Soviet Union was in terms of economic reality than I had anticipated on the basis of my studies. It really was a big third world country where nothing worked right. The telephones didn't work and bugging was so obvious that you could hardly get through all of the static and the clinks and clanks. It was ridiculous.

At the beginning it was a period of not much in the way of interchange. It improved a great deal as we went along. It was the *ottepl'* — the thaw period.

I was, as I say, very lucky because running these exhibits I started out in Moscow but then moved down to Stalingrad. It was, in fact, named Stalingrad when we arrived, and in the middle, on November 7...it was the night of November 6 that they came through and tore Stalin's statue down and for three days we had a city with no name. Then it became Volgograd.

Q: Did anybody know this was going to happen?

WATTS: It is very interesting what happened. This is an extraordinary episode, something that is really amazing. I was up in Moscow before we went down to Stalingrad and had bought myself some crummy Soviet clothes at GUM. Particularly at night, because my Russian was 4+,4+, I could go out and pass. People tended to think I came from Leningrad. I always said I was from up north.

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Suddenly on the evening of the 6th we were told in the hotel...the dezhurnaya, watch-lady came running and knocked on the doors and said, "Close your windows." So, thinking something was up, I immediately jumped into my Soviet clothes and whipped out the back door. The front door was literally locked, we couldn't get out. I went out in the street and looked up at the Hotel Stalingrad (Gostinitsa Stalingrad) which was next door and started to see the light bulbs going out on the S-T- A—L-I-N, but they left Gostinitsa and grad. Across the big square was the railroad station with it's Stalingradskii Vokzal, and all of a sudden the "Stalin" disappeared.

The next thing that happened was that this military wrecking crew came in with a big crane. They put a big thing around the neck of the statue of Stalin and pulled the statue over. When it came down...I was standing back, there was a huge crowd by this time and the police were very edgy...it killed one of the soldiers. The guy next to me said "the jealous Georgian strikes from the grave." It was a perfect line.

The next day was absolutely fascinating. Word had not gotten fully around that this had happened. When the crowd started to march in from the street square, they suddenly saw no statue and they could see the light bulbs were out. The paper had come out with Stalin in the title cut out. For three or four days it was a city with no name. We had about 25 Russian language people who were hired for these exhibits. We took a pool at the hotel, to see who could guess the new name. A lot of the Russians joined in but then they were called in and told they couldn't participate in the pool because it was a capitalist plot or something. So we had to give them all their 5 rubles back. But one guy, Norris Garnet, a USIA guy with the exhibit, came up with Volgogorod, that was so close to Volgograd that we declared him the winner.

Then we went from there to Kharkov. So I spent my first almost six months living out in the boonies.

Q: Could you talk a bit about what the exhibit consisted of and how it was received.

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WATTS: In the exhibit we had a car, a new Ford; a computer console for making reservations; everything to do with transport. There were things to do with railroads and cars and bicycles and motorcycles and computerization of getting reservations, etc. The exhibit was a tremendous hit. People were lined up for blocks to come in. Mostly, not because they cared that much about the exhibit, frankly, I don't think many did, but they just wanted to come in and talk to a bunch of Americans who could speak Russian. We got into the most amazing discussions. It was really a very lethal injection...I think in Stalingrad particularly, we changed that city in a lot of ways. People saw Americans. Here is this young bunch, mostly in their twenties, fluent in Russian, smart as hell and I remember one guys saying, "You know, you are not devils. We all thought you were all devils and you are not." It really had a big impact in the city. I went back several times later and people would stop me in the street who remembered me. This is a big city and yet they remembered you.

It really was an opening in terms of discussion and dialogue that was really quite striking. People were lined up to get in. They had enormous amount of police control. There was no question, there were just lots of goons in the exhibit all the time. We had one guy who was something of a zealot, I really had to try to calm him down. I said, "You can't cross a certain line. If you try to proselytize people, you are going to get thrown out of here or the exhibit will shut down." He was a real character, John DeLuca. You could see the police coming around and sometimes they would break up discussions and move people along. People then were cowed and did what they were told when the police moved in.

The other thing, of course, was that we were there twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, so it meant that when the exhibit was over you had all these people running all over town and doing all kinds of stuff. We did have a couple of people who got thrown out. One guy came in with about 150 copies of "Animal Farm" that he passed out at night, which of course they found out about. We had to get him out of town in a big hurry.

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Q: I have to tell you that somebody when I was in Belgrade came to me and nudged me and said, "Go down to the bookstore and look in their cultural section." There in English was "Animal Farm." People were taking great interest in farming!

WATTS: That reminds me when one time William L. Shirer went to give a talk in Milwaukee about his monumental book, "Berlin Diary." He arrived and found this absolutely overflowing crowd of people and he couldn't figure out what was happening. He looked and saw the sign, "William L. Shirer, the author of "Berlin Dairy."

But we had to get this guy out. We had a couple of cases of people who did get seduced by agents and pictures taken and had to get them out. But, by and large the exhibit went very well. As I say, I think it really left quite a big impact in the city.

To have that big group of bright young Americans whose Russian was damn good sort of all over the place... We could eat in the hotel, they had a dining room for us, but after two days nobody did. Everybody was going out and eating at the kiosks, etc. and getting to know people.

The other side about it was that when I would go up to Moscow, the political section people in the embassy would take me up to the safe room at the top of the embassy to debrief me because I was getting a special insight into what was happening in real life, in terms of the daily existence of Russians. A phenomenal experience — very, very exciting.

Q: What was your impression of how the people were living?

WATTS: They lived a very meager existence, there was no question about it. Long lines everywhere for everything from potatoes to meat. The state farm markets were just pathetic. The one thing where there was no question it was better, was in the private plots which collective farmers had and were allowed to grow. The produce that they brought in from that was really pretty good. The trouble was there wasn't enough of it, although it was what I think kept the place in a way going. The private plot was what added enough

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food into the economy to prevent what could have been real starvation in some areas. Those private plots were just taken care of like...you could see when you went to a kolkhoz market you could see the collective part and the private part and the growth ratio was like 5 to 1.

I never felt one thing, although I read individual cases of people that were truly very disaffected. But by and large that was not what I ran into, most it was one of anger at shortages, etc. but you didn't feel that there was this seething, like a revolution around the corner that people were actively trying to do something.

I had episodes when I ran into that. One really extraordinary event when I was down in Yerevan in Armenia, a guy came up to me at a restaurant and sat down. The waiters would put an American flag on the table whenever you went to a restaurant to identify you as an American, which meant most people wouldn't come near you at that point. This guy did come and sit down and in perfect English said, "I want to talk to you. Just don't act surprised, but my parents were born in Lynn and Boston and met on one of the ships coming back here during the war." There were a lot of Liberty ships that brought a lot of Armenians back to Armenia. They came voluntarily. He said, "I am born here, but I want to get out." He saw that I smoked. This was all done in a very cool fashion. At first I was wondering if he was an agent and then he said, "I can tell you where all the agents are. You look over two tables to the left and there is a guy who always follows me, etc." He then said, "When you want the next cigarette ask me for a match and then keep asking me for matches all through the dinner." Then another guy joined us. What happened was that over the course of the evening, each of them had written their name and address inside the matchbox. So at the end of it I had eight Americans who had given me their matchboxes and saying they were going to be in Moscow in something like 15 days and would try to come to the embassy in an attempt to go home.

My wife and I just sat there as these guys gave us these things one by one. I had all these things and was then told to go to the men's room and write my telephone where I could be

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reached in Moscow. I did so and wrote down my home number. And then I said to them, "Look, when you come up and call, for God's sake just say this is John, or something, because the phone is tapped." About three weeks later these guys came up and whoever called me was all excited and he said, "We will be at the embassy at 10:00." I swore to myself and hung up.

I go down to the embassy and at about five to ten I come out and the guards are there, etc. At 10:00 this car comes up and the guys start to get out and these two guards turned around and walked into their little booth and looked away. Two cars came careening around the corner on two wheels and these guys were grabbed and gone in a matter of ten seconds. I turned around yelling at these two guards who said they hadn't seen anything. We put in a protest and were told we didn't know what we were talking about. Who were these people? Of course, I didn't want to give them their names. I don't know what happened to them. It was really sad.

Q: Was Khrushchev's virgin territories program underway? This was opening up the wheat fields which turned into one of the great disasters.

WATTS: Oh, an enormous disaster. I wrote my masters thesis on that and suggested that because I had gotten from some place the weather situation, the rainfall. I shouldn't say that I predicted it, but there were specialists who knew it wouldn't work because it would blow away.

Q: We kind of did it in Colorado and other places like that during World War I. We expanded it during the high rain time and then it blew away.

WATTS: That is what the great Okies situation was all about. As far as what we were seeing was the rather drab, gloomy life that these people led. It was pretty damn bad.

Q: Efforts to capture Americans, particularly on sex or drinking, was that a big problem at the time you were there?

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WATTS: Oh, yes. It was a constant thing, particularly when you traveled. We had one episode when a guy named Carroll Woods, who was head of the economic section, and who has since died, and I went on a terrific road trip together. We were told where installations were and if we could, at least count masts of ships. I was busily taking some pictures when the door broke open and a gal came in with her dress pulled down and right behind her were guys coming in to accuse us of raping her. Fortunately, we had been told what to do, which was to turn your back and don't look around. It was a kind of constant episode — women with a sultry voice would call you in your hotel room asking to come up and have a drink.

Certainly the people in the embassy were so carefully instructed on this. If there were lapses it was very unusual. The exhibit was a different matter. These gorgeous gals would get these horny guys and the next thing they knew, bam! There were some ugly things like getting a girl to get a guy all aroused and with an erection and then a guy would come running in and grab him and pictures would be taken “proving” he was a homosexual. That sort of thing. Of course, we had to get these guys out when that stuff went on.

If there were cases in the embassy, I certainly was not aware of it. We were very carefully briefed.

Q: After you finished this time with the exhibits, what did you do?

WATTS: I moved into the cultural affairs section of the embassy. There were three of us. The other two guys were regular USIA people. I was seconded to that section, which delighted me because we had much the most fun. We were responsible for all of the exchange stuff, which meant that when any of the programs came — the New York City Ballet came with Balanchine, the Robert Shaw Choral and Benny Goodman — we went all over the Soviet Union with them.

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We also had to go around to inspect potential sites for future exchange programs. So I did a huge amount of traveling. It was a marvelous job. I couldn't have asked for more fun.

We were also responsible, by the way, for the distribution of Amerika magazine, which mostly we did by throwing it out of train windows. If you put it out in the kiosk, the authorities would just take them away.

Another thing we had to do was sort of a reverse thing. There were lots and lots of foreign exchange students, particularly from Africa who came to Lumumba University and wanted to get out and go to the United States. They were constantly coming into the embassy. I handled all of that.

Q: I was doing somewhat the same thing while in Yugoslavia when Sofia University emptied itself of African students. They got fed up and left. We were screening them. Did we have a brief to talk to these students and picking out the ones that might be good and saying, "Why don't you try, once you get out of the country, to....?"

WATTS: I had a standard program. Every student that came in I interviewed at some length. I would then write a despatch on every one giving the background of where they came from, how they came to the Soviet Union, what they were studying. It was always at Lumumba. What their record seemed to be like, if they had their record we would send it in. And, then we would suggest that when they went back, if they would like to apply there, fine. There was no way that we had access to enough material to make recommendations. The best I could do, I would have a closing paragraph saying that so-and-so appears to be very bright with excellent English, etc.

It was such a known fact that these guys were seeing me that the militia would tell them that it was the first door on the right, Watts is in there. A lot of them, particularly coming from Indonesia and Ghana, during the period of Sukarno and Nkrumah, got on the plane thinking they were going to the United States and when they got off found themselves in

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Moscow and were absolutely stunned. These were very angry young men, and they hated it. There is tremendous racism in Russia. These people were treated badly. If Russian girls went out with them, they would get beaten up— considered to be whores. It was a very sad situation. These kids would come in cold and miserable in the winter. It was pathetic. I made a somewhat specious recommendation that I thought in the future, I did put this in a despatch at one point, consideration for all Fulbrights coming to the United States, particularly from Indonesia and Ghana, should be required to spend two months of preparation at Lumumba University to give them a sense of what life would be like there compared to what life was like when they got here.

Q: You were there when the Kennedy Administration came in.

WATTS: Yes, I arrived in the middle of the summer of 1961.

Q: Were you there during the Kennedy/Khrushchev in Vienna?

WATTS: Yes. That was in September, but I was out in the boonies then and out of touch with reality.

Q: It was a time when Khrushchev was very much in his “in your face, challenging” period.

WATTS: It was interesting because it became one of the periods of extraordinarily opening up, one of the very exciting times up until the Wall. We were seeing a lot of people and suddenly it just clamped down.

Q: The Wall came when?

WATTS: I think it was in the middle of 1962, but I can't remember exactly.

Q: This is before the missile crisis.

WATTS: Yes.

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Q: Where were you when the Wall went up?

WATTS: I was back in Moscow in the cultural affairs section. There was a famous speech that Suslov, who was the Party ideologue, gave at a Party meeting up in Lenin Hills which came out and essentially brought an end to the thaw. Suddenly people just weren't coming to receptions, etc. It was a real different period, no question. And that remained up to the missile crisis.

Q: Kennedy called up some Reserves after the Wall went up, it was a tense period in the United States. I was back here in Washington and I recall we were really thinking this may be it. How did it translate in Moscow?

WATTS: All I can say is that I have very, very vague memories about it other than it went up. Again, I was in the cultural affairs section and our job was very different than the rest of the embassy. I read some of what was going on, but I didn't live with it day in and day out in terms of my work.

Q: After the Wall when things clamped down, were there things that had to be canceled?

WATTS: Yes, a lot of things. Part of what I did on my day to day work was work with the State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries run by a guy named Romanovski. And there was a State Committee for Scientific Exchange, the deputy was Penkovsky, who I dealt with quite a bit. What we were doing was making arrangements for exchange of delegations. I went one day to a meeting with the State Committee for Scientific Exchanges and asked the head of the group...we were coming to see the Bratsk Dam and they were coming to see the Grand Coulee Dam, or something. I said, "Oh, you are not Penkovsky, where is Penkovsky?" The guy said that he "was transferred to different work." Well, I just passed it off and we went ahead and had our meeting. I got back and reported to Dick Funkhouser, who was the economic counselor, and said, "Oh, by the way, Penkovsky wasn't there today, I met with a different guy." He looked at me and

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said, "What?" And then Hugh Montgomery came in who was the security officer who later I learned was the station chief, I didn't know that at the time. I told him that Penkovsky didn't show up, and I had been told that he had been transferred to different work. In retrospect, I didn't think anything of it at the time, Hugh Montgomery was out of that office like a rocket. I guess that was when Penkovsky was arrested. I never saw him again.

Q: Penkovsky was the highest placed person in the Soviet hierarchy...

WATTS: I think he was very senior and was providing us with extraordinary information. I saw not too long ago a British (?) film made on him and Greville Wynne, who I had met at a reception, and that whole operation. It was a sort of documentary on the Penkovsky files. If it was accurate, it was pretty damned amazing. He had real access and was getting into the inner files taking thousands of pictures. Finally he got caught and Greville Wynne got caught.

This was part of what we were doing all the time, these exchange programs. After the Berlin Wall, a lot of these things just didn't happen. Visas would not get issued. They got much tighter on who they would authorize in delegations. They would knock off a lot of names. Presumably they knew who some of the people were they didn't want in.

Q: How did you find the people you worked with on the Russian side? Were they people who just shrugged their shoulders saying you know how things are today?

WATTS: It really varied. I remember there was a guy from the ministry of higher education by the name of Rastaturov, with whom I felt I had a rather useful working relationship. On a couple of occasions, not often, but a few times, when the Department, knowing of this relationship, would send a cable saying, "Would embassy officer Watts, if he feels it appropriate, ask about such and such." Perhaps a visa had been turned down or something like that. I would go to Rastaturov and say that we would really like to have this

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guy go and what was happening. And a few times I would get it done; a lot of times, not. So, that could happen.

Another guy I got to know well in the State Committee for Cultural Relations, Burov, I don't know whatever happened to him. I think he was a real candidate to defect. He had been at the UN mission and he loved the United States. He was always getting me tickets for special shows. I gave him tickets to go to the Robert Shaw Choral, he and his wife, and they were absolutely thrilled over the performance.

So, there were a few like that. And Burov was another guy that I could say, "Look, this one we want, let's...," and sometimes it worked. You couldn't do it too often. There were a lot of others who were just cold fish and didn't give a damn. It varied. But, I think it was true that you could have exceptions and obviously you had to be able to deliver in return. So I would have to be able to tell the Department that he gave us on this, I am going to come in for the pro quo somewhere and they would usually do it.

Q: Can we talk about the missile crisis (October 1962) which was over in Cuba but this was probably the most dangerous point of the whole Cold War period?.

WATTS: Yes, I think it probably was. Events were developing at the UN, Adlai Stevenson showing those pictures of the missiles, and there were missile carrying ships on the way and we were scouting them like crazy. The tension increased day by day. A letter came into the embassy that I was not aware of, the first letter from Khrushchev to Kennedy. That was sent off to Washington. Then, about Tuesday of that week, a second letter was sent over from Foreign Minister Gromyko to Ambassador Kohler with instructions that this letter was to be totally secret and sent top priority...our equivalent of FLASH, which we used very, very rarely. Kohler gave this letter, it was about two pages long, to four of us and said, "Here, translate this." We had to go up to the secure room in the embassy, which was located on the top floor and was an enclosure inside a room that you went into, shut the

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door and turned on air pumps. I am not quite sure why we did this since the letter came from Khrushchev, but we did.

The interesting part was that each of us when we got part way through our translations sort of looked up stunned. This letter was intemperate. I recall, and this may now be memory playing tricks with me, in the segment that I translated at one point it was saying, "Kennedi, ti sukina-sin. Kennedy you son of a bitch." In any event, this was an intemperate letter by any stretch of the imagination.

We took this back down and gave it to Kohler, who was impatiently waiting for it. He knew it had to be something important. He read it...we used to kid about Kohler being the whistler because when he got a little nervous he would start to whistle...this time he went into a full symphony. I will never forget when he said two things. "Gentlemen, you may not discuss the contents of this letter with anybody including your wives." And then as he turned to go in and write his cover note, he said, "I think this may mean war." When your ambassador in Moscow says that, that sort of shakes you up.

Well, the message went off. I later was told that in the ExComm meeting, when the second letter was being discussed, and there were various accounts of what happened, but the account I got was via Chip Bohlen who was there. There were lots of different things thrown out as to what to do. Kennedy then turned to Thompson, this was dealing with the second letter and what it meant, and he said, "Well, gentlemen, you are the two top experts on this, I want your advice." This had been agreed before that he was going to turn to them. So, Bohlen opened this discussion, as I understand the meeting, and said, "Mr. President, we have discussed this at great length and are at complete agreement with what Ambassador Thompson is going to say. He is the senior of the two of us, and speaks for both of us." Thompson, according to this account I got, said, "Mr. President, you never received the second letter. Quite frankly we have read this over and over and over and we can't tell whether Khrushchev might have been drunk, might have had somebody with a gun at his head, there may have been a coup underway, we just don't know. But, whatever

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it is, if you respond to the second letter, whoever is the cause of that letter is on the hook. They are now committed and we don't know how you deal with that. The first letter you can deal with, it calls for two things—removal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey, which were obsolescent anyway, and essentially a no invasion pledge which is no big deal as we weren't planning to invade anyhow.” I was told that President Kennedy said, “Gentlemen, that is why we need career diplomats who know their stuff. Well done.”

I told this the other day to a friend of mine, Luke Battle, and he said, “Yes, I had heard about the unanswered second letter and the way I heard it was that somebody said that 'an unanswered letter is a letter that is answered.'" In any event, the thing that was intriguing about this...we didn't know about this yet as it occurred in Washington...and I had been invited to go out to Paris and give a lecture at the NATO Defense College which I can do periodically. Because of my wandering around the Soviet Union I gave them a picture of what was happening there that was quite different. I was leaving Friday to go out. I went to Kohler and said, “Mr. Ambassador, given what is going on, should I cancel the Paris trip?” He said, “No, no, we are going to act as if nothing is wrong. They know you are going and if you cancel it is a signal of something. We are not going to give any hints of any kind.” So, I left, got on the plane and felt like a real shit in a way. I might have been going out and they are all dead. I got into Paris and stayed with my wife's parents who were then in Paris. In the meantime I hadn't told her. I took a taxi and went to the apartment and came into the door and Brantz, my then father-in-law, said, “Did you hear the news?” I said, “No.” He said, “The ships just turned around.” They had just heard that news and that was when it was over. That was really high drama.

About a week or ten days later...I did not keep a diary which in retrospect I regret...we had a reception at Spaso House, the ambassador's residence. I can't remember what the occasion was, but the guest for the occasion was a pretty big deal. We expected absolutely nobody from the Soviet leadership to show up, we figured they would send...at the most Gromyko might come in for a minute or two. But, then the whole shebang marched in, Khrushchev, Mikoyan, Kosygin, Gromyko, Malinovsky, they were all there.

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Everybody was completely startled. It was obviously some kind of statement. How that was interpreted back in Washington, I don't know. And they were all being...Khrushchev as usual was bubbling around. Finally I went to Kohler and said, "Ambassador Kohler, wouldn't it be interesting to see what Rodion Malinovsky, the minister of defense, might say if I mentioned the second letter to him — just to see how he would react?" Kohler said, "Okay, once. You can make a reference to the second letter, once and no more. Don't follow it up. If he starts asking questions about it, just say you don't know anything about it; just that there was one. Get out of it immediately. Just drop it in a sentence and leave it at that."

I went over to Malinovsky, who was a caricature of a Soviet general. He was square with medals that went from his shoulders to his waist. You could just see he didn't want to be there. He was obviously there under command orders; they were making a show of amity. We chatted a little bit and then I said, "What do you think about the second letter?" He just froze. He stared at me for what seemed like hours but was maybe five seconds. Then in this deep voice he said, "Now I can believe in God" and turned around and walked out. Obviously what he realized was that we did get it and didn't respond to it and that it may have averted war. It was an amazing thing.

Q: I guess Khrushchev was feeling his weaknesses and also he was intemperate anyway at various times.

WATTS: When he was finally overthrown, a key charge against him was "adventurism," which meant he would go off half-cocked and they didn't know what he was going to do. A very interesting man though. When Benny Goodman came, Khrushchev came to the reception for Benny Goodman and I wound up interpreting for him for about a half an hour. Goodman was born in Minsk. He was what now would be a Belorussian Jew. Khrushchev was very interesting to interpret for because you never knew what he was going to say. There was an exhibit at the Manezh, an old Tsarist building used as an art gallery, showing of some of the modernist painters. It was shut down after three or four

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days and he referred to it, to Goodman, as “bychee gavno, dog shit. He didn't care what he said. He was a fascinating man. I think the Russians when you talked about Khrushchev there was no question that he had a real hold on a lot of Russians. This thing about being seen as a man of the people, I think that's true.

Q: A real populist.

WATTS: Yes, and he was. I think Gorbachev very consciously tried to pick up on some of that during his period of power.

Q: Although you were on the cultural side, were you getting any feeling from the rest of the embassy about how we felt about Khrushchev?

WATTS: Yes, it was a very close knit group as you can imagine, although lots of tensions as well when you live that close together. You get real groupings within. I certainly had good friends working in the political section so we talked about this stuff a lot. I think there was a general sense that Khrushchev was about as good as we were going to get. But I didn't get any hopes for a huge break through or anything like that.

Q: In your travels were you getting reflections of ethnic, nationality differences, etc.?

WATTS: A lot. When I went down to Tbilisi in Georgia, which I really love, the Georgians are a really wild people. You start off breakfast with a bottle of cognac. The anti-Russian feeling in Georgia was so obvious and the same thing in Armenia and Azerbaijan. It was so clear. A group of us were among the very first in the embassy allowed to go up to the Baltic States. We went to all of their capitals, Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius, and the same thing there. I remember going swimming one day and some guy came along and it turned out he was very open and his Russian was very good. He was very open about his anti-Russian state of mind. He told me, and again you are never sure, some of these may have been agents just trying to feed you stuff, you are never 100 percent certain, but he claimed that

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a lot of the Russians in all three of the Baltic States, with Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian passports, were in fact Russians.

What happened would be somebody would die and they would take that person's passport and recreate them. A Russian would be given that name and passport and a new birth date and would just move in. He was telling me that there were tens of thousands of people who now were supposed to be Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens who were in fact Russian transplants. I don't know whether that is true, although I have heard that elsewhere as well.

Yes, I must say it was not very hard to run up anti-Russian feeling wherever you went.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover?

WATTS: I don't think so.

Q: Well, when you left the Soviet Union, you left there when?

WATTS: In 1963.

Q: When in 1963?

WATTS: In time to be in Paris for July fourth.

Q: When one leaves the place one has the feeling of whither the Soviet Union and whither the United States and the Soviet Union. What were you thinking?

WATTS: I remember when I left Korea my feeling there was that the whole thing was going to collapse and North Korea had a good chance of picking up this rotten apple.

I think when I left the Soviet Union, my feeling was so heavily influenced by the missile crisis and the fact that as Dean Rusk said, "They blinked," and also this feeling particularly when I got back to the States the incredible strength of the United States compared to

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the Soviet Union, it just overwhelmed me. I arrived back in fact just in time for the Martin Luther King march on Washington and went down there when he gave his "I have a dream," speech. I think if anybody wanted a perfect timing to contrast two societies in their relative strengths and weaknesses there couldn't have been anything more dramatic than to leave the Soviet Union, post-missile crisis where they had backed down and realizing this place was a running outhouse, so badly run, so badly organized, the quality of goods, the quality of life was so rotten, and to come back to the United States and have this incredible peaceful march on Washington with a human rights declaration of extraordinary power carefully protected by the police instead of what would have happened in the Soviet Union. And then just looking around and seeing the wealth...I must say I felt very, very confident as an American at that time.

Now, I never would have up until the day it happened, predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union and I think virtually anybody who claims they did is an artful liar. Military strength was all they had.

Q: For all of us it is one of the great incidents in intelligence, the fact that the Soviet Union, which was our main rival, sort of fell apart and we really weren't ready for it.

WATTS: I think in fairness though I would say that looking at the reporting and later when I was in the White House on the NSC staff, I will argue that the reporting and intelligence reporting on the Soviet Union was pretty damn good. The question was what was done with it. I think president after president and national security advisor after national security advisor and others were always rather fascinated with the cloak and dagger side of things and tended to, as they did on a lot of reporting out of Vietnam, ignore a lot of very good reporting saying that a lot of these body counts don't compute.

Q: I think this is always a problem. Intelligence is sexier than straight analytical reporting.

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WATTS: I think the reporting that was coming out was that things don't work around here very well.

Q: In the summer of 1963 you came back and what did you do?

WATTS: I was assigned to Chinese language training, which was what I wanted. It is interesting that if I had not been taken out of Chinese language training, my guess is that I would still be in the Foreign Service. I really wanted to be as bilingual as possible in both Chinese and Russian. I went into the Chinese language program in August/September 1963. Marshall Green was then the deputy assistant secretary for state for East Asian affairs and I had worked for him in Korea. Marshall, who was a very foresighted guy, had wanted to develop within the Department a desk as opposed to something in INR that could deal with mainland China. But you could not have a PRC desk because Congress wouldn't have permitted it at that point.

What Marshall did was to create, obviously with the approval of Roger Hilsman and then William Bundy, the assistant secretaries, something called the Office of Asian Communist Affairs. The Office had technical responsibility as an operational desk for North Korea, North Vietnam, Mongolia, Hong Kong, because of the trade, and PRC. The China desk remained Taiwan. This Office of Asian Communist Affairs was to be looking at these other places. The rest of it was essentially a phony, it was a cover for having a China desk. We had a desk that had five people. There were: Burt Levin who was a language officer and later was consul general to Hong Kong and then ambassador to Burma; David Dean, who became the head of the US Interests Section in Taipei; Lindsey Grant, who went on to other things; Arthur Dornheim, resident expert on Mongolia and Hong Kong, especially the textiles issue; and myself. I was brought in by Marshall to be the Soviet eyes and ears in this unit. What happened was that because of a lot of bureaucratic nonsense, I was essentially shut out of all the traffic, the really sensitive stuff that I needed to see and have

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in order to do my job to be reporting on the Soviet issues of the Sino-Soviet relationship. I vented my frustration, but was still kept in the dark.

At this time, the guy I worked for in Moscow, Rocky Staples, who had been public affairs counselor in Moscow, had left the USIA and had gone to work for the Ford Foundation. He came to me and said, "Why don't you come work for the Ford Foundation?" So eventually, after a lot of soul searching, because I went into the Foreign Service forever, I did wind up resigning and going to work for the Ford Foundation. So that was the end of my Foreign Service career.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point for lunch?

Q: Today is October 25, 1995. Well, Bill, we have you leaving. How did your Foreign Service colleagues react to your leaving?

WATTS: Well, I had a lot of very, very good friends in the Foreign Service and I think a lot of them felt I shouldn't have done it. Some of them were really pushing very hard to get me to change my mind. On the other hand, I must say, there were a lot who wished they had the alternative that I suddenly had gotten to go up to the Ford Foundation; they might do it themselves. That was 1965 and by that time the Service had grown a great deal and it wasn't the kind of institution that it had been. There were a lot of people who were frustrated and other people were leaving, etc. But, it was no big deal.

Q: What type of work were you doing at the Ford Foundation?

WATTS: Well, I went up to work in the office of policy planning, which had been created by the president, Henry Heald, who had been the chancellor of New York University. He was essentially eased out of the job fairly soon after I went to work there. The head of this policy planning office was Malcolm Moos who had been Eisenhower's speech writer. He was the author of Eisenhower's famous farewell speech, with the warning about the

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“military-industrial complex.” That was another big part for my leaving because I had gotten to know Mac and I had come to deeply respect him.

We were meant to be an independent office advising the president about where the Foundation should be going. Some of it was like an internal audit function, looking at different programs. It was not a very popular office, as you could imagine, within the Foundation. When Mac Bundy came up to take over the Foundation he very quickly abolished it. So at that point I went with Mac Moos to work in the office of government and law which was basically working completely on domestic stuff. One of the things we got very involved in was the federal-state-local equation. I did a lot of work on programs that involved state governments. That was really very interesting work. It also meant that I got to know a lot of governors; when you are coming out of the Ford Foundation to go to visit in a state capital, and the governors see you representing \$3 billion, however you want to look at it, they want to meet with you. So I got to know a number of governors very well. Two in particular, one was Terry Sanford of North Carolina and the other was Nelson Rockefeller in New York.

This led to a remarkable turn of events one day during the 1968 campaign. I got a call from both Terry Sanford and Nelson Rockefeller asking me to come work on their campaigns. I wound up going to work for Rockefeller. A political campaign is an unusual thing. There is no way to describe it in any sensible form, it is just sort of controlled chaos for about five or six months. You are scrambling every day. I became the coordinator of Rockefeller's research operations, both the foreign policy and domestic policy stuff, based in the headquarters building. I also lived in Katonah, not far from his estate in Pocantico Hills. I am really sad that he did not become president.

Q: Did you get involved in his foreign policy side?

WATTS: Yes, both foreign and domestic. I was sort of a coordinator. We had two arms in the research policy thing. One was domestic which was headed by Richard Nathan,

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who was at Princeton and wound up at something I think called the Rockefeller Institute of Public Affairs at the State University at Albany. The foreign policy side was run by Kissinger and that is how I got to know Henry. I saw a great deal of him. After the nomination, I left the Ford Foundation and stayed working with Rockefeller in New York State government. During that time, Nancy McGinnis (a key assistant to Rockefeller; she had not married Kissinger yet), started pushing me to go to Washington. I did not particularly want to. I did not like Nixon at all; I had voted for Humphrey. I was also very ambivalent about Kissinger, an ambivalence I later shed.

I had a couple of meetings with Kissinger in Washington. Then, one afternoon, I got a call from Ann Whitman, Rockefeller's secretary, who said that the governor wanted to see me. He said that I had to go to Washington. I said, "Well, I don't want to go." He said, "Well, Henry wants you." I said, "So, I understand, but I would much rather stay and work here. I don't want to go down there and work for Nixon." After a little more Rockefeller said, "Well, Dick called and he said..." I said, "Dick who?" He said, "Dick Nixon, you fool." Then I said, "Well, I really don't want to do this." Rockefeller looked at me and said, "You have no choice. He is the President of the United States. All I can say is if you don't go you can never criticize again. You are being offered a chance to change things." Rockefeller was not fond of Nixon, but his sense of patriotism and duty overrode that. So, I went to work there in August, 1969; it really didn't last very long.

Q: What was your job?

WATTS: I was what used to be the executive secretary. What happened was when Kissinger took over he did not want to and Nixon did not want to have...the executive secretary of the National Security Council operation was a congressional approval slot and they did not want to have that position approved by congress. The National Security Advisor slot is not approved by congress; I personally think it should be. I wrote an article about this after I left, when I was called to testify on the Watergate business.

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So, they gave my job a different title, staff secretary, and I didn't have to be confirmed by the senate. I was basically in charge of running the thing, making it work. I did not have a specific line responsibility for any single policy. But on the other hand, the way that Henry worked, meant that I got involved with things across the board. For example, the China opening, the staff member responsible for China was not brought in at the outset on much of what was going on. We had a third country intermediary who was going back and forth between Washington and Beijing with a one-time pad. We were dealing directly: the link was between Kissinger and Zhou En-lai. This guy was delivering messages back and forth, unknown to the NSC man and Bill Rogers, the Secretary of State. This was the way that Kissinger and Nixon worked.

A combination of factors. One, Kissinger at the beginning was extremely nervous. He came in as an outsider to the Nixon operation. Obviously he had been working for Rockefeller for years, and he had let it be known that he didn't think much of Richard Nixon. Haldeman and Ehrlichman cordially despised him, and he cordially despised them. They were constantly making all kinds of disparaging remarks about him. I remember once going up in the elevator in the West wing, and we were going to see Nixon. When we got into the elevator, Haldeman and Ehrlichman were there. It was a small elevator, you could only get four people in it. There had been an article in the Post saying that Kissinger had been seen the night before at some watering spot in Georgetown with some attractive woman and they both said, "Gee, I thought you only took out boys." This kind of stuff. It was rather sleazy.

There was this backbiting that you just can't believe. The saddest part of it to me was that you had two men who had superior intellects. Kissinger and Nixon had very exceptional brains. They were also, in my view, amoral in the very basic sense of the word. Right and wrong was not part of their calculus, it was win and lose. They had in their natures, which I felt was so debilitating in working there, this combination of secrecy and paranoia. If you

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had people with comparable intellect and nobler instincts it could have been one of the great combinations in the history of the human race in terms of ability to achieve.

Q: You say you prepared briefing books?

WATTS: Yes, some.

Q: One of the things I noted in interviews I had talking about Nixon when he was Vice President, he really read his briefing books and knew his lines. Did you find this to be true?

WATTS: Yes, absolutely. He was a very quick study. He read fast and quickly. He absorbs stuff. One of the things that disappointed the hell out of me was that when I would call up Ted Eliot, who was then the Executive Secretary at State, and say that we were going to have a press conference on such and such could we get some briefing material. What would come over from State tended to be terribly weak. It was very disappointing.

Q: In what way?

WATTS: It was mushy. It was much too long. There would be a possible question, suggested answer and the question would be half a page long and the suggested answer was a page and a half long. You can't do that. Part of it was understandable, the professional thing, that is you don't get into the politics of stuff, but there tended to be no bite in the responses. What happened as a result was, and this was very disappointing to me, ultimately it wound up that we wrote the briefing books in the White House. Nixon would deliberately let Kissinger know he was going to have a press conference on Friday but would not be announced to the bureaucracy until 48 hours before hand, although we would know about ten days in advance.

The effect of that was to cut them out, which is what, in fact, happened not only in press conferences but policy, period. The State Department, the Defense Department and others were just plain cut out. The whole China opening was done behind the back of the

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Secretary of State. The Vietnam stuff, I didn't know what was going on until way late in the game. Kissinger had been going off — he said to New York — but really went to Paris. He took Tony Lake at least one time. I didn't know. These were all on weekends so they could get away. I didn't even know he had gone. It was an amazing operation.

But one thing I will say in terms of skill, was how Kissinger kept sorted out all of the deceptions he was pulling with his own colleagues. It was just amazing. There was one case at an NSC meeting Nixon said something and Kissinger jumped and looked across. Rogers didn't catch it but Elliot Richardson did, that there obviously was another channel. This had to do with the SALT stuff. Elliot was on the phone in a minute after the meeting and Henry really had to double-talk to get around him. Elliot knew something was up, there was no question about it. I can't remember exactly what Nixon said, but he just simply made a reference to a conversation that nobody else even knew had taken place.

One time after the end of an NSC meeting, Rogers left his briefing book behind and I picked it up to get it back to him. There was practically nothing in it, just an agenda. It was basically empty. The whole relationship between that White House, the NSC and the rest of the bureaucracy was certainly wrong.

Q: I would have thought that after time, and even though you had pawns like Larry Eagleburger and others, I mean it is so easy to develop what amounts to contempt towards everybody else and we are omnipotent almost. We are bright and can do these things, etc.

WATTS: There was a great deal of that and basically what happened was that on the very sensitive key stuff we did it ourselves. We did the Vietnam talks, all the secret talks, the China contact, increasingly the briefing books on the press conferences we did, the whole secret bombing campaign, called Operation Menu, was done through direct links with ourselves. We had two officers from the Pentagon, who were our two guys. They were basically stealing stuff out of Mel Laird's office to bring over to us. We didn't know that

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they were swiping stuff from us to take back to them. But this was done completely out of channel. I don't think contempt is the right word. I think it was just a sense that it was going to take so long to get something out of State because it had to go through so many clearances that by the time you got it, it was going to be so watered down that there was this tendency. Henry was adamant. He said just don't call them.

Q: Were you able to talk to Ted Eliot and say, "Look, we have a real problem here and....."

WATTS: Oh, I did. Ted and I became very good friends. I had known him before. We spoke at length about this during and since we both left. It just plain didn't happen. It is a big operation and Bill Rogers, who is one of life's loveliest people, was not a strong Secretary of State. But the biggest problem of all was this extraordinary relationship that developed between Nixon and Kissinger. Nixon had such contempt for the State Department, just total. He wanted to "keep those bastards out of it, the White House will just do it," That was about the way it worked.

Q: What sort of things were they doing?

WATTS: There was the whole question of whether Biafra was going to go separate or not. There were other approaches being taken to the Biafra rebels that State had nothing whatsoever to do with. This happened in a number of different areas, like all those secret links to China.

Q: One of your problems when you bypass bureaucracies is that you can get things done very quickly and you can also run across all sorts of obstacles, problems that you never thought up. There is an awful lot of cleaning up to do. I served in a dictatorship in Greece and watched these colonels get into an incredible mess because they weren't putting things in order.

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WATTS: I wrote a memorandum to Kissinger relatively early after I had come down to work. It was called "On Dealing With State." I showed this to Roger Morris and Tony Lake before I sent it and they said, "You know you are probably signing your death warrant by sending this thing." They both said this was going to blow Henry's mind because I was making that case as a former Foreign Service Officer: My case to Henry was that you have an enormous repository of knowledge, of historical memory of cautions on things over there at State. It doesn't mean that you have to be ruled by it, but you ought to take advantage of this tremendous competence that does exist and swallow the fact that things are going to be slower and all of that. You need this information, you ought to have it and plus which in terms of trying to serve the President in the best possible way, you ought to be drawing on all this.

Usually when I sent him a memo he would call me in to discuss it or mark it all up or disagree with it or something. After reading this one, there was just a little check in the corner and it came back. Nothing. My guess is that probably signaled to him that I represented a bad seed. I don't know.

I do agree with you, it does cause problems and it did, but they didn't care. Those two men, as I said earlier, fed each others worst instincts and they were both so sure that they were right. They both had this passionate interest in foreign policy and did know a lot. Nixon, in those years in limbo when he was working for that law firm did basically two things: he traveled around the world and lined up delegates. His time in the US was spent going to every graduation, bar mitzvah, christening, ceremony for every Republican potential delegate that he could. He lined up votes all over the country. It was an incredible job that he did. The other side was that he traveled all over the world and met everybody. And, of course, Kissinger had run that foreign policy seminar at Harvard, so he met a lot of comers because he had made a big point of bringing in a lot of potential world leaders to Harvard. So you had these two people who had this incredible telephone directory and they could virtually call anyone in the world because they knew them all. I think they just

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felt that they didn't need all these people, they knew what to do and who to talk to. It was very heady.

I must say working there was most extraordinary until I became increasingly disillusioned.

Q: What about your colleagues? Larry Eagleburger was there for a while. Tony Lake. Haig.

WATTS: Larry had gone. In fact, when I came down, part of it was because Larry had moved off to Brussels. Haig came a little before I did, he was a colonel. I came to view him as driven and narrow. The "I am in charge here" statement, after the Reagan assassination attempt, was typical of that driven nature.

Tony Lake had a front office staff assignment role, and became very involved in the secret Vietnam negotiations.. He became almost like a son to Kissinger. It was a very close relationship. He was, I think, less critical of Henry than Roger and I have come to be. Tony, also, is much more in the center politically than either Roger or I. Very, very competent, a good worker, terrific staff man. It does not surprise me that in his role now as National Security Advisor that he has not taken on any of the kind of aura that Kissinger had or Brzezinski. I think part of it is because of his experience with Kissinger. He made a very conscious decision that he wanted to be a facilitator and not an operator, more in the mold of Brent Scowcroft or Bill Hyland. I think Tony's biggest problem is that I don't think he commands the kind of respect that you need to command in that job to make things happen. Part of that is because he doesn't have that close a relationship with the President, who doesn't give the same attention to foreign policy matters.

Q: You mean Clinton?

WATTS: Yes, Clinton.

Q: Going back to your time, what was Tony Lake's role?

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WATTS: He started out working right outside Henry's office basically as his appointments guy. It was clear that he had more talent than to do that. We eventually brought David Young down to take over as Kissinger's appointment secretary...of course, he and Bud Krogh were the famous plumbers who ran the plumbers operation which is where all the phone tapes and stuff emanated. At that point Tony became sort of a special projects guy for Kissinger. He kept an office over in the basement office...all the NSC staff was in that Old Executive Office Building. The only people over there in the White House basement were Kissinger and Al Haig, and Tony. At one point Jonathan Howe was also over there. Bob Houdek, who later became an ambassador somewhere in East Africa, was the press liaison, and worked with Ron Ziegler. Tony became more and more of a special projects guy and got heavily into the secret dealings with the Vietnamese, and probably a lot more that I still don't know about.

Q: What was the feeling among you all...those of you with a Foreign Service background...about the Nixon and Kissinger approach to Vietnam?

WATTS: That was a very mixed bunch of people we had there at the time. Europe was handled by Hal Sonnenfeldt and Don Lesh. Don was a Soviet affairs type and later came and worked with me at Potomac Associates, leaving the Foreign Service. Asia was handled by John Holdridge and Lindsey Grant, both of whom are now retired, and then there was a guy from the Agency whose name I can't remember, but he was very good. Latin America was handled by Pete Vaky, who later became ambassador to Venezuela, and Arnie Nachmanoff, who became an investment banker in London. Africa was Roger Morris. The Middle East was Hal Saunders and Susan Brownell and then Sam Hoskinson came in. These were some State, some CIA, some civilian.

On Vietnam, I don't know how a lot of the others like Sonnenfeldt felt. It was very much structured along the lines of the State Department by bureau. The people who were most directly involved — Holdridge, Grant and the CIA guy — were kept out of a lot of stuff. For example, when Nixon decided to give his famous Vietnamization speech in November

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1969, Tony Lake, Roger Morris, and I were given the first-draft task. The Vietnam people weren't even brought in on it. We drafted a speech which was getting us out of Vietnam in somewhere between six and eight months. We wrote a very dovish speech, which didn't get very far. The final speech was basically written, as I understood it, by Bill Safire and people like Pat Buchanan and Ray Price.

It is interesting, people didn't talk across their policy boundaries very much. At least I didn't have that sense. Staff meetings were kind of pro forma, and they eventually pretty much stopped. Like the NSC meetings that gradually got less and less frequent, and became less and less meaningful. Everything tended to get handled more and more by direct action: NSC staff would prepare the memo, Kissinger would take it to Nixon, he would approve, and we would act, without going through the standard NSC channels.

In the case of the Cambodian operation, which is when I quit, I will have to say John Holdridge came to me saying, "You have to stand behind the president, he is putting his political career on the line, we must rally behind him." I said, "No way, I am out of here." I think John was genuinely shocked when I resigned. John is a military graduate and is used to a command structure that gives and takes orders well.

I think it would be fair to say that general foreign policy the thinking of the NSC staff as a whole was substantially more liberal vs. conservative, multilateral vs bilateral/unilateral,, than that of the views of Nixon and Kissinger. Basically you would have thought that this was a Democratic administration in terms of a lot of people on the NSC staff.

Q: Did you find that Kissinger was sort of hung up in a political litmus test on things he sent up to Nixon or was he giving his best shot as where things should go rather than what would gather more Republicans together?

WATTS: I think that he and Nixon over a period of time came to feel that their views were in sync. That is a very, very difficult question to answer because that is not something I discussed with him. But, I would say that I think his way of dealing and what went forward,

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by and large would be something that because he knew what Nixon was after and he agreed with, was going to work in that direction.

You know it is very interesting. Scotty Reston had an interview with Kissinger, which I must track down because it is one of the most revealing interviews of his. At one point, Kissinger was then Secretary of State by that time, Reston asked him, "Henry, you are credited with having a grand world view and a global strategist. What is your view?" And then it said [Kissinger chuckling], "If you want to find my world view you will have to check with my speech writers." I thought when I read that, this was after I had left, that it was so revealing: the strategist of these two was not Kissinger, it was Nixon. Kissinger is the tactician. And this is one of the reasons that they worked together so well. I think Nixon really did have a real world view and that Kissinger understood this and was the guy who could do all the skullduggery to get things moving in that direction.

Q: Did you find on the NSC...you were there from when to when?

WATTS: I was there for one pregnancy. I went down August, 1969, with some misgivings, and resigned at the end of April, 1970 when the Cambodian invasion occurred. I stayed on until July to clean up all the notes I had on NSC meetings, etc. So, about a year, but after Cambodia, I was a complete pariah and cut out of everything.

Q: Did you find in the various areas there one has the feeling that certainly until late, Kissinger had no interest in Africa or Latin America.

WATTS: The period I was there, through the middle of 1970, overriding focus was on four things: The Soviet Union, SALT Talks, and very secret stuff going on in terms of Vietnam, and very secret stuff going on concerning China. But publicly the emphasis that was being taken was the Soviet Union and the SALT Talks. You have to remember that this is the period leading up to the riots in Washington, the march on the White House where people were walking around with candles.

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The night of that march, Tony, Roger and I were in the White House basement drafting this Vietnam Vietnamization speech for Nixon. At that time I was still smoking and I went up to take a break and walked down to the southwest gate and people were walking around out there and there was my wife and three daughters with candles. They didn't see me. You talk about emotion. I am on the inside, the enemy, and there are your own wife and children outside marching.

Q: I think for an awful lot of people it was skeptical but how the hell do you get out?

WATTS: Yes.

Q: It was more of a tactical thing. What about the Soviet Union, how was it viewed?

WATTS: It was the big question. Were we going to go to war or not? Could we really get a good SALT agreement or not? There were real fears as to what was happening internally over there. We had sort of remarkable channel with Dobrynin. I have not read his memoirs, but I really want to, I gather they are extremely interesting. Apparently he really talks a lot and says a lot of things about a lot of people. I had the feeling that the Russians really knew how to handle and work with and on Nixon and Kissinger. The critics will argue that the SALT agreements that we got were actually a lot worse than we might have been able to get. That is the single most difficult policy subject I have ever run across. How you decide tradeoffs in that area is really tough. You need to discuss the goods and bads of those agreements. You have to talk to people who were right in the middle of it, like Bill Hyland and Hal Sonnenfeldt and Larry Lynn. But, there is no question that was the key focus. If you look at NSC meetings that we had, there was one after another that had to do with SALT go-arounds, summits, etc. You would have a meeting on Africa and send Rogers off or let Agnew go and hope he didn't screw everything up unbelievably. He was a real dummy. We tried to make sure, if we were going to have an NSC meeting, one of the first things I would do was to find out what Agnew's travel schedule was so that if it worked out we could have it when he was out of town because he was just a pain in the neck.

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Q: Technically he was a member of the NSC.

WATTS: Yes, he was a member. The National Security Council when I was there was the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and Director of the Office of Defense Mobilization. Those were the five statutory members of the National Security Council. It is a constant mistake when people say so-and-so was on the NSC. Kissinger was not on the NSC, he was the head of the staff. Helms was not a member, he was only there in his role as Director of Central Intelligence.

I will have to say about that staff, it is the best group of people in terms of overall competence I have every worked with. There were a couple of real exceptions, but by an large...and the papers that were prepared and the ultimate papers that went from Kissinger to Nixon which is how most of the decisions were made...the NSC stuff would come in from all the other departments...State, Defense, CIA, Agriculture, Commerce, etc...and it would go through the NSC process there would be a common document about two or three inches thick. On top of this would be a memorandum of anywhere from 3 to maybe 15 pages which we wrote and would fairly represent what came in but then the description and way it was setup, the final positioning was fair, but it would have clearly a thrust and with the recommendation of yes, no, abc or whatever. But I have to say that these papers were damn good. There was an impressive level of candle power over there to getting a paper together and into shape for something the President would see.

Q: You have your three choices, approve, disapprove or...?

WATTS: Some were just an approve, disapprove or whatever. Others would have various specific choices to make. You bomb, you send in paratroopers or you sell helicopters or you don't. It could be either an up or down on a single point. I can remember one when Rockefeller went on that big swing through Latin America he promised to sell some helicopters to Peru and it took about eight months to get the decision through because the

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Pentagon or somebody was really opposed to doing it and it was a nightmare. Basically that was just yes or no.

Q: In the process, were you all making decisions and setting the parameters first?

WATTS: This probably happens with every administration, at the beginning we had what were called NSSMs, National Security Study Memorandums. That would go out from Kissinger saying the President wants to dah-dah-dah, and that would go to wherever it should go to in the bureaucracy. Papers would come back. There was a committee, the Under Secretaries Committee, which was the highest committee under the NSC, which would meet to review all of the different stuff that had come in from the various departments, and a conglomerate paper was put together and ultimately wind up as being the NSC system paper on the subject. But, as I say that tended to be very long and it had to have a cover which was written entirely in the White House. That was where we took over, the NSC staff took over.

Now, sometimes, in some cases, it never went through that whole process. We just did it. As the relationship between Kissinger and Nixon grew...it took quite a while to get to this, well on after my stay, about a year...Kissinger would sign off for Nixon on some stuff. The one thing you never know on this, and I don't know how it works now, Kissinger would go to see Nixon every day. I used to have to come in about 5:30 or so to go over the night's take to put together the points for his meeting with the President at 8:30 or whenever it was. We would have to figure out what was the really critical stuff that has come in and he would want to discuss with the President. And then, of course there would be other things that were pending issues, etc. Those meetings were alone. What was decided in those, it was hard to tell. But I think one of the things that clearly would happened is Henry would get essentially a go ahead in certain areas. When he came back he would then be willing to sign off on something having discussed it with Nixon.

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Q: What about people like Morris in Africa, Vaky in Latin America, could they in some ways because of lack of interest by the President, kind of run things themselves?

WATTS: Anything that was of genuine substantive importance I don't think they would have been likely to have gone on their own. What could happen is that they would have a chance to talk to Kissinger, maybe at the end of a staff meeting, or they could just send a memo recommending action and getting his approval to do it. A lot of that kind of thing went on. Obviously, sure at times, you get a call from a desk officer with a question and doing something and if they felt this was clearly in the parameters of what the policy was, they would say, "fine." It was a matter of judgment and how key the things were. Obviously there were certain things that they just didn't and properly they wanted to make sure because one thing we all recognized was that Nixon was a very political president and therefore there were a lot of things on the foreign policy, side alone was fine, but like the Middle East stuff, he saw a lot of David Rockefeller which means you are talking about oil, so you are going to be pretty careful. He had people like Armand Hammer coming around about the Soviet Union. Nixon was really awed by these people who had big money. No question about it.

But, yes, there is a certain amount of stuff that...I mean, Ted Elliot would call me and ask what I thought of such-and such and I would say, "Yeah, go ahead that sounds good. Don't even bring it over to us, just do it." I must say in the beginning when I first arrived, I wouldn't have done that. But you get the sense of what has been decided and what as not and what the parameters are after a while.

Q: Moving on to your departure. Was this a build up?

WATTS: Yes, it was a build up in the sense that I was getting increasingly frustrated personally by my job. What was happening was that Al Haig was moving himself up in the hierarchy and he had gotten by this time another star or two which must have been among the fastest promotions in the history of the military. The guy was a tough infighter. As I said

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I was getting frustrated by the realization I was being pushed aside, and the fact that I had just really become very, very against what we were doing in Vietnam. That big march that they had around the White House, there was a double line of busses all the way around. There was only one way you could get in, and that was a small opening between two of the buses. . I left to go out and join with these protesters out there, sitting with those kids all smoking pot and Dwight Chapin, Nixon's appointment secretary, comes through taking pictures. He looks down at me and says, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I'm with them." He said, "What?" And then these kids say, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm on Nixon's National Security Staff," and they are all cheering that I am out there with them.

But, this had been building up going back to that November speech and the Cambodian thing was the following April. I found myself working for an administration, and with a particular group of people who I was coming to respect less and less, i.e. Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Al Haig, and to a lesser degree, Haldeman. Ehrlichman I actually quite liked. He was really quite a nice guy. Haldeman was a real ice man in there.

I was finding myself increasingly in this position of being in the middle of something I didn't want to be in the middle of. By this time Tony, Roger and I had really kind of gotten to be quite close and spent a lot of time together talking things over. We were all sort of moving in the direction of leaving.

What happened in my case as we went into that final week of going into Cambodia, suddenly Henry decided to use me in terms of handling and coordinating a lot of the most highly sensitive...there was a special Khmer slug that was put on anything to do with the operation, and that came only to me and a few others. Then, we went through this famous Friday night meeting, the so-called "bleeding hearts" (Henry's term for us) meeting, when he called Tony and Roger, Bob Osgood, who was the head of the long term policy office in the NSC which had no role, Larry Lynn, who ran the systems operation, and myself together. Henry said, "We are going into Cambodia, the decision has been made, using fixed wing aircraft." This is something I will always regret that I didn't say, "Yes, but it is

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also ground troops.” I didn't say it, I wish I had. I know that Tony knew it, but I don't know who else knew that. This thing was really handled tightly. At one point he asked what we thought and I did said, “Henry, one thing is that we are going to go into Parrots Beak and Fish Hook (Vietnamese sanctuaries on the Vietnam-Cambodian border), we are going to flush them out of there and they are going to run all the way to Phnom Penh, and that is the end of Cambodia.”

That was Friday night. He called me Saturday night before I left and said, “We are meeting tomorrow at 4:30 Sunday afternoon and the President is going to name you as the staff coordinator for this operation.” I had written a memorandum earlier to Nixon, through Kissinger, about the so-called October Option, “Operation Duck Hook,” which was going to be a massive bombing of Haiphong and Hanoi, opposing it. In the memo I said that if you go ahead with this my prediction was that we were going to have massive rioting around the country. That the National Guard was going to be called out and that some students were going to be killed somewhere. My last sentence in that memo was saying that “You will have to be prepared to deal as brutally with domestic dissent as you are with the Vietnamese communists.” Again, it was just read with RN and HK initialed on it when it came back. No comment. So, I just sent it back saying, “Henry this is it, I said it all right there.” The next thing I know these guys say I am the staff coordinator.

So, I went home Saturday night and sat up a good bit of the night and went off that Sunday to the office to get ready for this meeting. I don't think when I left the house I was sure what I was going to do. I went through the day preparing for the meeting and finally I said to myself that I won't do it. So, at 4:00 I went to see Henry. When I came down here I had written a letter, because I wanted it in writing, saying that I was coming to work for Henry, but that my loyalties go in the following order: 1) to my country and the American people, 2) to you, and 3) Richard Nixon. I am surprised after that letter that he gave me the job. So, I said to Henry, “You remember what I said in my letter when I came here, well, you have just called my bluff and my loyalties are to the American people and I'm refusing the assignment, I am leaving.” And then Kissinger said something that I will never forget. He

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said, "Your views represent the cowardice of the Eastern Establishment." I just came up out of my chair swinging, I was so damn mad, and missed him. He ran behind his desk and said, "I am only kidding." I said, "Well, you don't kid about something like this," and just stormed out of the room. The buzzer in Haig's office was ringing, and he goes in. I went straight to go see Winston Lord, who had sort of moved in there as sort of an assistant. I told Winston what had just happened and said, "I'm leaving and I'm sure he is going to appoint you to replace me, so you had better be ready because he is going to call you in any minute." Suddenly Haig came flying out of Henry's office and came back into the situation room. He said, "What the hell did you say to Henry, he is furious. He's throwing books around the room and screaming and yelling." So I told him that he said I was to be the staff coordinator and I wouldn't do it.

At that point Haig then looked at me and used a line that not long afterwards he used with Bill Ruckelshaus at the time of the "Saturday night massacre," he said, "You have had an order from your commander-in-chief and you can't refuse." I looked at him and said, "Fuck you, Al, I just have and I am resigning." This all appeared in "The Final Days," Woodward and Bernstein's book and in Sy Hersch's book, "Price of Power." My dear mother, bless her soul, later was reading "The Final Days," and came across all of this in the book and she called me up and said, "Willy, did you really try to hit Mr. Kissinger?" I said, "I sure did." And did you really say that terrible thing to General Haig?" And, I said, "Yeah, Ma, I am afraid I did." And then she said, in a sweet plaintive voice, "Does it have to appear in print?"

Anyway, I left. I got home and walked up the walk to my house and my wife opened the door. She didn't know for sure what I was going to do when I left that morning, and said, "You resigned didn't you." I said, "How do you know?" She said, "You are smiling for the first time that I can remember." It was really interesting.

So, that was the end of my government career.

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Q: A couple things on this. There is an aftermath. So often when one resigns one is picked up by whatever amounts to the opposition and used in such a way that one finds uncomfortable. Did you find this happened?

WATTS: No. I was approached by several newspapers and individual journalists that offered some pretty handsome sums of money for a big interview, but I refused all of that. Actually, I got out of the country. My ex-wife and I had a place in the Bahamas and we took off and went down there. My decision at the time, to me, was very simple. In retrospect, and I have talked about this with Roger Morris, we both agree that we made a mistake, we should have gone public by calling a press conference and announcing our resignation and why. And, perhaps even said that there was going to be an invasion of Cambodia, although we could have gone to jail for that and also could be threatening a lot of lives. But, at least after the fact to come out and say something.

At the time, and going from my own memorandum, which proved to be sadly prophetic, there were students killed at Kent State and Jackson State (Jackson State is never mentioned, which is one of the reasons Blacks can march a million people on Washington.) Kent State got all the mention but Jackson State was worse. It was all Black and who cares about a Black college in Mississippi. It is an absolute statement of America that nothing is ever said or pictures shown about what happened at Jackson State. It is amazing.

Q: What happened at Jackson?

WATTS: First of all, as I said we went out of the country to the Bahamas. But basically because of the fact that I did feel that way and then it did happen and these kids were killed, I felt that I was...and I know I discussed this with Roger...

Q: How many of you left at this point?

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WATTS: Just the three of us, Tony Lake, Roger Morris and myself. They left under different circumstances. I was given a specific assignment that I refused and therefore I said that I was out of here. They left just sort of feeling, as Tony has put it to some people, they had no usefulness left because they were looked upon as essentially unreliable, they had gone over, which was essentially true.

My feeling was that we were sitting on top of a potential of something close to civil war. Those demonstrations and tear gas at Dupont Circle, people forget about, but were very, very big stuff. There marches on Washington, the National Guard was out around here. The marches on the Pentagon. You were talking about the potential for massive civil unrest and a lot of people getting killed and I felt that I did not want to contribute to that by going public in a big way and Roger Morris felt the same way.

Q: Going back a bit, did you find working at the NSC that you were being courted by the press, was this a problem?

WATTS: Not at all because at that time because of the secrecy cum paranoia of Nixon and Kissinger, we were forbidden to deal with the press. Basically you had to report any contacts and as a general rule you were not to deal with the press. I had a few friends that I talked with. Peter Lisagor, I became very close to and spent time with him, and Hugh Sidey, and they both urged me when I resigned to do a public interview. I explained why to them, that I didn't want more violence than what we had at Kent and Jackson States. They were very understanding about it, saying that they respected my judgment. My sense is, at least as far as I was concerned, the word went around very quickly that this is why this guy left and this is how he feels about it and you are just wasting your time.

Q: You said you came back to clean up or something?

WATTS: Yes, I just stayed on. You see, I went to almost all of the NSC meetings and was sort of a note-taker and follow-upper. I had never transcribed all these notes and you

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needed to do that to get them into the files. That took a little while. So, I stayed on to get the files up to date. The one thing I regret is that I had huge files of my own and left them all behind because I knew I was not supposed to take them, although nearly everybody does.

Q: Were you there during "Plumbers' Operation", or did that come a little later?[My guess as to what the question was]

WATTS: Yes, I was there. That was David Young, he and Bud Krogh were... I didn't know they were in operation. I knew about the taps because I read some of them. I wasn't supposed to see them. They were handled by a completely separate channel. A specific courier came over from the FBI to deliver these personally to Kissinger. I was in one Saturday and happened to be on duty and the guy came in and gave it to me, and I opened it up and boom, it was a tap on Halperin. I sealed it back up; I didn't want to see any of this stuff again ever.

Q: When I was in Greece and we were dealing with the colonels, a nasty bunch of people, at country team meetings I saw this phenomenon happen where the station chief would give some information and the rest of us would give overt information and the so-called secret information seemed to be more powerful than the other. I would think that people who were paranoiac like Nixon and Kissinger would gravitate towards the so-called covert information.

WATTS: I think there is a lot to that. I have been told by people who have worked in other White Houses, certainly Roger who had worked for Johnson before, say that these people, Kennedy was evidently famous for this, were just fascinated by this secret stuff that would come in and give it greater credibility than a straight despatch. The CIA briefing stuff that came over, they loved to get that stuff in the morning report. There was the CIA overt deputy, the DDI, who was very good in that report, he honed it down. I had gotten to know him a bit, and I told him that if he wanted to get Nixon and Kissinger to read this, it cannot

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be more than three or four pages and you really have to select very carefully. And he really took this to heart and they read this stuff, and were big on it.

Q: When you look at it, most of the stuff is paid for. You pay somebody to give you the information and that should immediately make one suspicious about it.

WATTS: Absolutely, but there is some feeling that we got this and since it is secret and undercover, it must be better. But, look at this blowup about the bug and the Japanese. They are sort of laughing because people here are saying it was lousy information.

Q: Well, just to sort of wrap this up, where did you go?

WATTS: Well, what happened was I left the White House and went on vacation, got back and had a call from Irwin Miller, who was at that time the chairman of the Cummins Engine Company who had been the co-chairman of the Rockefeller campaign and had been also on the board of the Ford Foundation. I had gotten to know him through my Ford Foundation work and a lot better during the Rockefeller campaign. As the campaign went on I became close to Rockefeller and saw a lot of Miller.

What happened was after I left he at that time was just beginning to think seriously about supporting John Lindsay for his presidential run. I got this call to go out and see him in Columbus, Indiana where he lives. After about three meetings he decided to hire me.

We established something called Potomac Associates. It started out as a for profit company and Don Lesh, who had been with me at the White House, came and joined me and some others. We thought we were going to create a little NSC, literally. The idea of calling it the Potomac Associates was because it was the Potomac River which had an implication of Washington and the White House. Everything we did should be something that the President of the United States should read, and that was our mission. The first couple of years went like gangbusters. Our first book was "The Hopes and Fears of the American People," which wound up as a front page story on newspapers across the

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country. We were just stunned by the response. It came out in the early 1971. Nixon attacked the book in a speech in Kansas City where he talked about a group of Liberal renegades trying to run down the country. We talked about how Americans looked into the future, on a “ladder of expectations.” It showed that people looked down instead of up. It was front page on many papers on the Sunday of release. We were, it amazed.

The second book we did was “The Limits To Growth,” the Club of Rome study. I wrote the forward to that, we really wrote that book. That book sold about 40 million copies worldwide. Unfortunately, Aurelio Peccei, the founder of the Club of Rome gave the copyright away, which is just unbelievable. It could have set up a foundation with a huge amount of money to pursue his vision, but he gave it all away.

So we had these first two things which were great successes.

Part of the reason for setting Potomac up and my own interest in doing it is that I was fascinated by the fact that in the White House meetings we would have, particularly on Cambodia, that Nixon and Mel Laird always expressed particular conviction that they knew what the public wanted. They had been elected to office, and having been elected, “I know.” And, of course, my sense was that having been elected proved nothing except they got more votes than the other guy because they clearly didn't know what the public wanted, certainly on Cambodia.

This is one of the reasons why in my work I have used polling as a part of it, trying to get a measure of what the public thinks about an issue. That is not to say then that is right, but what it is to say is that if you think your policy is right and the public doesn't agree with you then it tells you something you have to do. It can give you a policy guidance as to what you can do or need to do in order to get there. On the other hand, if you want to change policy, know what you are up against. That is why I have tried to link the two. It has been fascinating and I have very much enjoyed it.

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We did one study on China, particularly on the issue of backing China vs Taiwan, this is before we broke with Taiwan. When Secretary of State Cy Vance went to China I sent him a copy of our study. As he sat in Beijing with Deng Xiaoping and started to say something about attitudes on China Deng Xiaoping says, "Yes, I have my copy." It was on his desk, translated into Chinese. Cy got back and called me up and said, "How did you get your book to China before I got there?" I told him I had given some copies to the China Liaison Office here. I was really delighted.

Q: Okay, great. Thank you.

End of interview